





# Review of historic East Coast Canal held

Experts along with people's representatives inspect site

UBACHAK MOHANTY  
BALESWAR



sites which included Naikul-Solpata under Sadar block and Mandhata-Bhograi lock via Mandhata and Jamkunda. Deputy chief whip and MLA Remuna Gobinda Chandra Das, Sadar MLA Manas Kumar Dutta and district Collector SM Vikash were among others present with the team. Once lifeline of the district and now in defunct state, bear-

ing the brunt of neglect, care and dredging, the Coast canal, stretching from Guakhali of West Bengal to Barabatia of Bhadrak was made by the British. The works for the canal started in the year 1880-81 under food for work to prevent people from acute famine then.

of the indirect charges and was revised in 1888 chiefly on account of excess in navigation works due to bad foundation and cost of extra land. The revised estimate was nearly Rs 45 lakh. Apart from providing relief to starving people of Odisha during 'Nanka Durvikhya,' it proved to be a boon for the undivided Baleswar district as it opened

up new trade transport and communication routes. About 16 km stretch between Nusharbad and Bhograi lock is still navigable and over 500 acres of land avail irrigation facilities. The revival of canal would create a potential source for irrigations. Further it would help in promoting freshwater pisciculture.

According to the experts opinion on the revived canal while would provide an alternative mode of communication for people of Baleswar and Bhadrak, it would help in protecting the countryside villages from high tides during cyclones and saline water ingress. The team further reviewed the progress of work of a water amusement park at Nuniajodi.

# Services of key depts missing in FM MCH, B'swar DHH

Action Committee to gherao Collector, stage demo before Assembly

UBACHAK MOHANTY  
BALESWAR

The residents of Baleswar are facing a jolt from the FM Medical College and Hospital as they are deprived of healthcare facilities of several key departments against their hopes and expectations.

The much hyped 650 bedded medical college and hospital has been established at Remuna in 2018 to provide better and advanced healthcare to the patients of the district as well as of neighbouring districts and States.

In the initial phase the district headquarters hospital (DHH) was acting as a unit of the medical college where students were given training. However, since April, 2024, after construction of building works at Remuna, OPD, IPD, emergency medicine, dermatology and psychiatric departments are being run from the new facility.

However, neither the DHH nor the medical college has important departments like cardiology, urology, neurology, oncology and nephrology. Consequently, the poor patients have been the worst sufferers as they have to move at least 250-300km to avail the consultancy, advice and tests, etc at Cuttack and Bhubaneswar.

According to an administrative officer of the FM MCH,

opening of PG courses for three departments such as cardiology, neurology and urology is on the anvil. And, specialist doctors would be available in those departments soon.

Regarding the issue, Government Medical College and Hospital Action Committee president Niranjan Parida said, "We had submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister on January 10 demanding opening of certain departments and we got assured of action within two weeks. Yet, so far, nothing has been done in this regard." He warned, "In order to press our demands, on February 20, we would stage a gherao of the district collectorate and later, stage dharana in Bhubaneswar during the Assembly Session."

# In Boudh Man, grandson killed as SUV hits bike

PNS ■ BOUDH

Two persons were killed and another sustained critical injuries after a speeding SUV collided with their two-wheeler at a village in Boudh district on Sunday night. The mishap took place near Khajuripada Chhak when the victims were returning from a wedding party. The deceased were identified as Bighneshwar Mahar (50) and his 12-year-old grandson Omkar Sethy.

to attend a wedding feast. While returning, his grandson Omkar insisted on accompanying them home. On the way, the SUV, allegedly driving at high speed, crashed into their two-wheeler from the rear, grievously injuring all of them. Locals rushed the injured to the District Headquarters Hospital, where doctors declared Omkar and Bighneshwar dead on arrival. Himanshu was shifted to the VIMSAR at Burla as his condition was highly critical. On being informed, police initiated an investigation into the mishap and efforts are on to trace the driver of the SUV, who fled the scene soon after the accident.

# B'garh MP meets Rail Min over demands

PNS ■ BARGARH

Bargarh MP Pradeep Purohit met Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in New Delhi to push for key rail demands in western Odisha. Purohit submitted a letter requesting an intercity train from Bargarh to Bhubaneswar, which has been a long-standing demand here. He proposed daily morning services and urged extending the Puri-Sambalpur-Puri Intercity train to Bargarh or Balangir or introducing a new train from Bargarh Road/Balangir to Bhubaneswar. The demand for better rail connectivity in the region has persisted for years. BJP leaders, including the Railway Minister, have previously assured extending the Puri Intercity to Balangir. Purohit reiterated this, urg-



# 10K Olive Ridley's begin egg laying in R'klulya mouth

Last year the turtles had skipped the spot

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR



The egg laying process of Olive Ridley turtles has begun at the Rushikulya river mouth in Ganjam. The significant event marks the year's first mass nesting occurrence.

According to reports, nearly 10,000 Olive Ridley turtles have laid their eggs. This is a significant development as, due to climate-related factors, the turtles did not lay eggs last year. Authorities are hopeful that in the coming days, many more Olive Ridley turtles will arrive at the river mouth to lay their eggs, continuing this important natural event.

The population of Olive Ridley turtles in Odisha is facing a serious threat due to illegal fishing activities near the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. These activities, carried

out by organised fishing mafia groups, have escalated into violent confrontations. On January 12, a violent clash occurred at sea when the fishing mafias opened fire during a Forest Department operation. The face-off led to the escape of eight fishermen who had been previously apprehended. The illegal fishing activities took place approximately seven kilometres from the sanctuary's coast, a crucial area for Olive Ridley turtle conservation. In response to growing threats to Olive Ridley turtles, the Odisha government has

intensified conservation efforts. On December 23 last, the Forest Department hosted a training workshop in Puri to raise awareness among staff about protecting these marine creatures. Held at the Krushnaprasad block office, the event involved the Balugaon Forest Division and other conservation stakeholders. The workshop focused on safeguarding turtles as they arrive along the Chilika Wildlife Division's shores, including areas like Nuapada, Satapada, and Rambha, key nesting grounds for the

turtles. It also equipped staff with knowledge to strengthen conservation efforts for these seasonal visitors to India's coastline. The reproductive process of Olive Ridley turtles is fascinating. A female digs a pit in the sand to lay 100-150 eggs, covers it, and returns to the sea. Remarkably, she does not stay to witness the hatchlings, which emerge after 40-50 days and make their way to the sea independently. This unique phenomenon of maternal absence during the hatchling's journey is a key focus for conservationists studying the species. Shocking discrepancies have

# In Keonjhar Security guard found dead outside office

Family alleges murder

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

A body of a security guard was found near the gate of the Rural Piped Water Supply Project office on the outskirts of Anandapur town in Keonjhar district on Monday morning. The deceased was identified as Sukhadev Sahu, who hailed from Padmapur village. Sahu was working as a security guard at the local water supply office and reached the facility on time for his duty at 8 pm. After he did not reach home the following day after his usual time at 8 am, family members launched a search for him. Subsequently, his body was found outside the back gate of the office in the morning. Shocking discrepancies have

been brought forward by relatives and locals who alleged that Sahu was murdered. For one, the deceased was in full uniform but had no shoes on, which were lying scattered nearby. A metal rod soaked in blood was also found near his dead body, raising glaring suspicions of a murder. However, the most shocking aspect of the case was that someone had signed a logout time on the attendance register of the facility even when Sukhadev never left the facility. "When we asked the other security staff as to who had signed on the attendance register on Sukhadev's behalf, one of them said that they did it as per the instructions of their supervisor. We are pretty certain that this is a larger conspiracy and demand a probe into the matter," stated a relative of the deceased.

# Blackbuck population rises to 8,789 in Ganjam

7,745 counted in 2023, 4,082 in 2018

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR



The total number of blackbucks, locally called 'Krushnasar Murga', was 8,789 in the biannual census conducted by the Forest Department on January 29 in all three forest divisions in the district. Their number was estimated at 7,745 in 2023 and 4,082 in 2018, said sources. Out of the total blackbuck population in the latest census, 5,241 were females, 1,765 males and 1,783 young. The blackbuck is a Schedule-I animal as per the Wildlife (Pro-

tection) Act 1972 (amended in 1992) and is considered as vulnerable as per the Red Data Book. The highest number of

blackbucks was sighted in Ghumusar South division (5,627), and the lowest number of 404 was counted in Ghumusar North division. A

total of 2,758 blackbucks were found in Brahmapur forest division, sources said. Improvement in habitats, protection given by the local

people and forest staff are some of the reasons for the increase of the population of the blackbuck in the district every year, said Ghumusar South DFO BK Acharya. People in the district protect the mammal religiously over the years. "The people of the region believe the sighting of blackbuck in the paddy field is a harbinger for them," said Blackbuck Protection Committee (Ganjam) president Amulya Upadhyaya. He said villagers do not harm blackbucks. The animals are freely roaming due to the protection of the villagers. Ganjam district is the only habitat of blackbucks at present. Blackbucks sighted in

the Balukhand-Konark wildlife sanctuary in Puri district till 2012-13, vanished from the area. The Forest Department has taken initiatives to regain their lost habitat in the sanctuary area in Puri by translocation of blackbucks. DFO Ghumusar North division Himanshu Sekhar Mohanty said the department has already shifted four blackbucks—three females and one male from their area to Puri. Another four animals would be translocated soon, as per the decision of the government, he added. The government has taken the decision to shift the animals from Ganjam district, as they are overcrowded in the district, sources added.

# Yarlung-Sangpo river dam by China could be catastrophic

G Hardin in 1968 published an article on "Tragedy of Global Commons" in "Science", which refers to a situation where commonly shared resource is depleted due to individual users who pursue their self-interest and use it without limits and without paying heed to collective good. Invoking his term, resource based domination of river water by China is against environmental justice, equity and legitimacy.



BISHNUPRIYA PADHI

We would go with the analysis of environmentalist Dr Nithyanandam who pointed out that a massive project undertaken by China could prove catastrophic given the delicate ecological system of the region. China has decided to construct the world's largest dam on the Yarlung-Sangpo river. The decision of constructing 60 GW hyper dam upstream will have serious downstream ecological and security implications for India, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The controversial project is situated 30-40km from India's border, which was approved on December 25, 2024. The dam could disrupt down-

stream water flow in the river Brahmaputra and pose daunting geopolitical challenges. The mega dam is planned near the Great U-Bend of the Yarlung-Sangpo in Tibet, which marks a significant development in its water resource strategy. Geo-partial experts explain that the dam, situated at less than 40 km from the Line of Actual Control, marks a potential threat to India's downstream regions. This is a fragile region prone to seismic activity, landslides and flash floods. The fragile ecological set up wouldn't withstand the pressure of water in such a large

dam, should any natural calamity take place. The magnitude of water would exacerbate existing disasters and put additional pressure on India and Bangladesh. The plea that China takes on India's concerns about downstream effects is that the proposed dam would mitigate disaster risks and enhance development of clean energy and climate change response. China also claims that the construction of hydro-power project has gone through rigorous scientific verification and wouldn't have any negative impact on ecological environment, geology and water resources of the downstream countries. Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson, Guo Jiakun stated that the project would be beneficial to the downstream disaster prevention and mitigation and response to climate change to a certain extent. US National Security Advisor Sullivan visited Delhi and held talks with External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar. The issue of proposed dam construction by China too was put by the Indian

officials during the discussion with Sullivan. It may be recalled that on December 27, 2024, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Mao Ning, defended China's plan to build the world's largest dam saying that the project will not negatively affect lower riparian countries and that the safety issues have been addressed through decades of studies. "The project will not negatively affect the lower reaches", she said referring to the concerns of India and Bangladesh. She also said that "China will continue to maintain communication with countries at the lower reaches through existing channels and step up cooperation on disaster prevention and relief for the benefit of the people by the river." **India's concerns** In an interview to the Federal, Dr Nithyanandam raised fears of ecological harm and water security issues. According to him, about 30-40% of Brahmaputra's water originates from the Yarlung-Sangpo river. Any disruption of the flow could impact downstream water

availability. India's primary concern is the strategic location of the dam and likelihood of its weaponisation by China in the form of manipulation of water flow to gain upperhand in geopolitical disputes. India lacks a formal water-sharing treaty with China, which complicates its ability to address these concerns. India and Bangladesh, forgetting their current differences, should collaborate to highlight the potential consequences of the dam and raise the issue in international fora. Regional diplomacy is likely to have an impact on China. The international pressure may encourage China to adopt more sustainable practices. If any preventive measures were to be taken, they should be implemented now. It is a well known fact that China's environmental policies in large government projects have often been inconsistent. If strict monitoring with suitable technology use is not guaranteed, the impact on downstream could be catastrophic, experts opine. Some argue that India's own hy-

dropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim could justify China's actions. But experts clarify that India's projects are smaller in scale and subject of stricter environmental scrutiny. India should improve its water management and storage infrastructure to mitigate any potential disruptions caused by the dam. The Hong Kong based South China Morning Post has reported that the proposed dam would cost China one trillion Yuan (\$137 billion) which would dwarf any other single infrastructure project on the planet. It poses enormous engineering challenges as the project site is located along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur. The Tibetan plateau, regarded as the roof of the world, frequently experiences earthquakes more often. On January 7, Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, has also asserted that the Government of India is on alert regarding China's plan to construct the mega dam on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet and it would continue to monitor and

take necessary measures to protect India's interests. The hydrocracy of China seems innocuous in the planning stage. But it has serious consequences with regard to the violation of human rights of the people of TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) as well as lower riparian countries. Human rights lend themselves uniquely to developing a comprehensive, coherent and workable framework for and approach to water sharing in rivers and their just and non harmful use by humans. Human rights of the people of these regions are better positioned to become a moral basis of a view of natural resource governance. The sovereignty over natural resource of Brahmaputra river vis-a-vis protection of human rights of the likely affected people need to be seriously weighed by China, India, Bhutan and Bangladesh involving international community in an era of cataclysmic climate change. (Dr Padhi is a freelance researcher with specialisation on international diplomacy)

# Qatar's Amir to strengthen ties with India in two-day state visit

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, who is scheduled to pay a state visit to India on February 17-18, will meet President Droupadi Murmu and hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday.

According to a media advisory issued by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Monday, he is expected to arrive in New Delhi later this evening. His visit will provide "further momentum to our growing multifaceted partnership", the MEA had said in a statement on Saturday. He will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, including ministers, senior officials and a business delegation, it said.

According to the media advisory, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will call on him on Monday evening after his arrival.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives the Amir of the State of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani upon his arrival in India, in New Delhi. PTI

On Tuesday morning, the Amir of Qatar will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhawan, which will be followed by his meeting with Prime Minister Modi at the Hyderabad House. He will hold talks with Prime Minister Modi, covering various aspects of the bilateral relations, the

MEA said in the statement on Saturday. Exchange of MoUs are scheduled on Tuesday afternoon after which the Amir of Qatar will meet President Murmu, as per the advisory. His visit comes at the invitation of Prime Minister Modi. This would be the second state visit of the Amir of Qatar to India. He earlier visited India in March 2015, the MEA earlier said. India and Qatar have deep-rooted historical ties of friendship, trust and mutual respect. In recent years, the ties between the two countries, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people ties, have continued to strengthen. The Indian community residing in Qatar forms the largest expatriate community of Qatar, and is "appreciated for its positive contribution in the progress and development of Qatar", it said earlier.

# India, Bangladesh holds kye border talks amid tentions

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

A high-level delegation of the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the border guarding force of the neighbouring country, reached Delhi on Monday for bilateral talks on issues like fencing and attacks on Border Security Force (BSF) personnel and civilians by Bangladeshi miscreants, officials said.

The 55th Director General-Level Border Coordination Conference between the two forces will be held at the Border Security Force (BSF) headquarters here on Tuesday.

The Bangladeshi delegation reached India onboard a flight and they will be here till February 20. Apart from participating in the bi-annual talks, they may also call on some senior Union home ministry authorities, the officials said. This is the first top-level meeting between the two border guarding forces after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in August last year. The Indian delegation is led by BSF Director General (DG) Daljit Singh Chawdhary while the visiting Bangladeshi team is headed by



BGB DG Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui.

The BSF said in a statement last week that the conference is being organised to discuss border-related issues and improve coordination between the border guarding forces. Discussions will be held on preventing attacks on BSF personnel and Indian civilians by Bangladeshi-based miscreants/nationals as well as trans-border crimes, construction of single row fence, action against Indian Insurgent Groups in Bangladesh, issues related to border infrastructure, joint efforts for effective implementation of Coordinated Border Management Plan, Confidence

Building Measures and other issues, it had said. The last edition of these bi-annual talks was held in Dhaka in March last year. The 4,096 km long India-Bangladesh boundary spans across five states - West Bengal (2,217 km), Tripura (856 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Assam (262 km) and Mizoram (318 km). The BSF is designated as the lead security and intelligence-gathering agency for this front. The ties between the two countries came under some stress after the neighbours summoned each other's high commissioners in December last year over the construction of the border fence by India and some other issues.

# SC orders UP authorities to explain Mosque demolition amid contempt allegations

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed Uttar Pradesh authorities to respond as to why contempt proceedings should not be initiated against them for razing a portion of a mosque at Kushinagar in alleged disobedience of the apex court's direction. A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih also directed that until further orders, there shall be no demolition of the structure in question.

The bench passed the order while hearing a contempt plea against the authorities concerned in Kushinagar for their alleged wilful disobedience and failure to comply with the top court's November 13 last year directions.

In its November 13, 2024 verdict, the top court laid down pan-India guidelines and barred demolition of properties without a prior show cause notice and 15 days' time to the aggrieved party to respond. The fresh petition, filed through advocate Abdul Qadir Abbasi, said the authorities had demolished the outer and



Photo: File photo

front area of the Madni mosque in Kushinagar on February 9. Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, appearing for the petitioners, said the structure in question was constructed on a private land owned by the petitioners. He said the construction was with due sanction of municipal authorities according to a sanction order of 1999. Ahmadi argued that the demolition was carried out in "egre-

gious contempt" of the directions issued by the apex court in its November last year judgement. "Issue notice as to why proceedings for contempt should not be initiated against the respondents," the bench said and posted the matter for hearing after two weeks. "It is further directed that until further orders, there shall be no demolition of the structure," the top court said.

At the outset, the bench told Ahmadi that the apex court was asking the petitioners alleging contempt in demolition matters to approach the jurisdictional high courts with their grievances. While referring to the directions issued by the top court in its last year verdict, the senior advocate said, "Please see the manner in which they have demolished this (structure)." The plea alleged that the demo-

lition was carried out without following the due legal process and in clear contravention of the guidelines issued by the top court. It claimed the authorities failed to provide the mandatory opportunity of a hearing to the petitioners before proceeding with the demolition. "This act of proceeding without affording opportunity of hearing is a violation of the fundamental principles of natural justice, which were explicitly expected to be followed by the authorities, as outlined in the directions issued by this court," the plea said. "The administration, by taking such an action in haste, has shown complete disregard for the religious sentiments of the local Muslim community, who rely on this structure for their religious practices," it said. The plea said the land on which the mosque was built upon was purchased by the petitioners through registered sale deeds dated June 29, 1988, March 28, 1989, June 30, 1989 and February 23, 2013. It said the map for construction of mosque was sanctioned in September 1999 by the nagar panchayat, Hata.

The plea alleged that a local politician had lodged a complaint in December last year claiming encroachment of the land in question. It said the SDM of Hata had carried out an inspection and filed a detailed report which said there was no encroachment by the petitioners. The plea sought direction to the authorities to maintain status quo at the mosque. It also sought directions for restoration or suitable compensation to rectify the situation caused by the demolition. Passing a slew of directions, the apex court in its November 2024 verdict made clear that they would not be applicable in case of unauthorised structures in a public spaces such as roads, streets, footpaths, abutting railway lines or a river or water bodies apart from cases where there was a court order for demolition. "No demolition should be carried out without a prior show cause notice returnable either in accordance with the time provided by the local municipal laws or within 15 days time from the date of service of such notice, whichever is later," said the top court verdict.

# BJP has highest income share among national parties: ADR report



BJP campaign

Photo: File photo

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The BJP reported the highest income among national parties in the financial year 2023-24, declaring total earnings of ₹4,340.47 Crore, according to poll rights body Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR). The amount accounted for 74.57 per cent of the total income of six national parties during the period under review, the report by ADR said. A large portion of the income for national parties came from donations through electoral bonds.

"The BJP declared a total income of ₹4,340.473 Crore during FY 2023-24 but spent only 50.96 per cent of it, amounting to ₹2,211.69 Crore. The total income of Congress was ₹1,225.12 Crore, while its expenditure for the year was ₹1,685.63 Crore or 83.69 per cent of its total income," the report said.

While the BJP received the highest amount, securing ₹1,685.63 Crore, the Congress received ₹828.36 Crore, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) ₹10.15 Crore. Collectively, these three parties raised ₹2,524.1361 Crore - 43.36 per cent of their total income - through the electoral bond scheme, which the Supreme Court struck down as "unconstitutional and mani-

festly arbitrary" in May last year. As per the data shared by the State Bank of India in response to an RTI application filed by the ADR, ₹4,507.56 Crore worth of electoral bonds were redeemed by various political parties in the 2023-24 fiscal. The national parties accounted for 55.99 per cent - ₹2,524.1361 Crore - of this amount. The report said the maximum expenditure by the Congress was made towards election-related expenses, amounting to ₹619.67 Crore, followed by ₹340.702 Crore spent on administrative and general expenses.

In comparison, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) spent ₹56.29 Crore on administrative and general expenses and ₹47.57 Crore on employee costs. Among the national parties, six declared receiving a total of ₹2,669.87 Crore from donations and contributions. The report also noted that out of these six parties, only Congress (₹58.56 Crore) and CPI(M) (₹11.32 Crore) declared receiving a total income of ₹69.88 Crore from the sale of coupons. The audit reports of CPI(M), Congress and BJP were submitted with delays ranging from 12 to 66 days. The most common expenditure among national parties was on elections and administrative expenses, the report said.



# Delhi government to challenge acquittals in 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Monday informed the Supreme Court that it will file six appeals challenging acquittals in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases.

The court was hearing a PIL filed by former Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee member S Gurlad Singh Kahlon. In 2018, the apex court on his plea constituted an SIT to probe 199 cases where investigations stood closed.

On Monday, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Delhi government, told a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan that a decision has been taken to challenge acquittals in the top court. Taking note of the submission, the bench directed the Delhi government to file the appeals in six weeks and said the special leave petitions be placed before Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna for tagging with the present case.

During the hearing, senior advocate H S Phoolka, representing petitioner Kahlon,

submitted judgments showing that prosecution was "hand in glove" with the accused in the case. "These are not normal cases. There was cover up and the state did not prosecute properly. These cases are crimes against humanity," he said.

The court had earlier quizzed Delhi Police for not filing appeals against acquittals in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots cases and said prosecution should be carried out "seriously and not just for the sake of it". Delhi witnessed large-scale violence and killings of persons from the Sikh community following former PM Indira Gandhi's assassination by her bodyguards in 1984 and the cases stemming from the incident have seen some major twists and turns 40 years on.

According to a report of the one-man Nanavati Commission, formed to probe the violence, 587 FIRs were registered in Delhi in relation to the 1984 riots in which 2,733 people were killed. Of the total, the police shut about 240 cases as "untraced" and about 250 cases resulted in acquittals.

# Shivraj Singh Chauhan to launch NAKSHA pilot program to digitise urban land records

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan on Tuesday will inaugurate the National Geospatial Knowledge-based Land Survey of Urban Habitations (NAKSHA) to create and update land records in urban areas in 152 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) across 26 states and three Union Territories (UTs). The event will take place in Raisen, Madhya Pradesh, the ministry said in a statement.

The Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, has initiated this pilot program. The NAKSHA program aims to create and update land records in the urban areas to ensure accurate and reliable docu-



Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan Photo: File photo

mentation of land ownership. The Rural Development Ministry said this initiative will empower citizens, improve ease of living, enhance urban planning and reduce land-related disputes. "The IT-based system for property record administration will foster transparency, efficiency and support sustainable development," the ministry said. The Survey of India is the technical partner for NAKSHA programme which is responsible for conducting aerial surveys and providing accurate imagery, through third party vendors, to

state and Union Territory governments. An end-to-end web-GIS platform will be developed by the Madhya Pradesh State Electronic Development Corporation (MPSEDC) and storage facilities will be provided by the National Informatics Centre Services Inc (NICS). The states and Union Territory governments will conduct field surveys and ground truthing using the orthorectified imagery, ultimately leading to the final publication of urban and semi-urban land records. The NAKSHA pilot program is expected to cost approximately Rs 194 crore, fully funded by the Government of India. The occasion will be marked by flying of drones, launch of Standard Operating Procedure (SoP) booklet, video and flyer on NAKSHA Programme, the statement added.

# SC court flags centre for absence in key cases, citing lack of courtesy

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Show some courtesy to the court, the Supreme Court said on Monday while flagging that law officers or lawyers on behalf of the Centre were not present before it during the hearing of a suit filed by the West Bengal Government. A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih expressed displeasure while observing that no law officer was present in the court when the matter was called for hearing. A lawyer told the bench that Solicitor General Tushar



Mehta, who was to appear in the court in the matter, was arguing another case before a bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna.

"Somebody should be here. This is showing no courtesy to the court. There are so many law officers," Justice Gavai said.

"Show some courtesy to the court. It is a dispute between a state and the Union," the judge said and pointed out that there are also many senior lawyers on the Centre's panel. The bench then passed over the matter on the request of the lawyer. Later in the day, when the solicitor general appeared in the court in some other matter, Justice Gavai told him, "Mr solicitor, in that West Bengal matter, nobody was present. It cuts a very sorry picture that the Union is not interested in important matters. There are so many law offi-

cers, there are so many senior counsel on your panel and not a single lawyer was present." At the solicitor general's request, the bench adjourned the matter for two weeks. "Mr Tushar Mehta cannot be in every court. There are 17 courts," Justice Gavai said in a lighter vein. The West Bengal government has filed an original suit in the apex court against the Centre under Article 131 of the Constitution, alleging that the CBI has been filing FIRs and proceeding with its investigation, despite the state having withdrawn the general consent to the federal

agency to probe cases within its territorial jurisdiction. Article 131 deals with the Supreme Court's original jurisdiction in a dispute between the Centre and one or more states. In July last year, the top court had rejected the Centre's objection to the lawsuit's maintainability and listed the matter for framing of issues. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing in the matter for the West Bengal government, had argued that once the state had withdrawn its consent on November 16, 2018, the Centre could not allow the CBI to enter its territory for investigation.

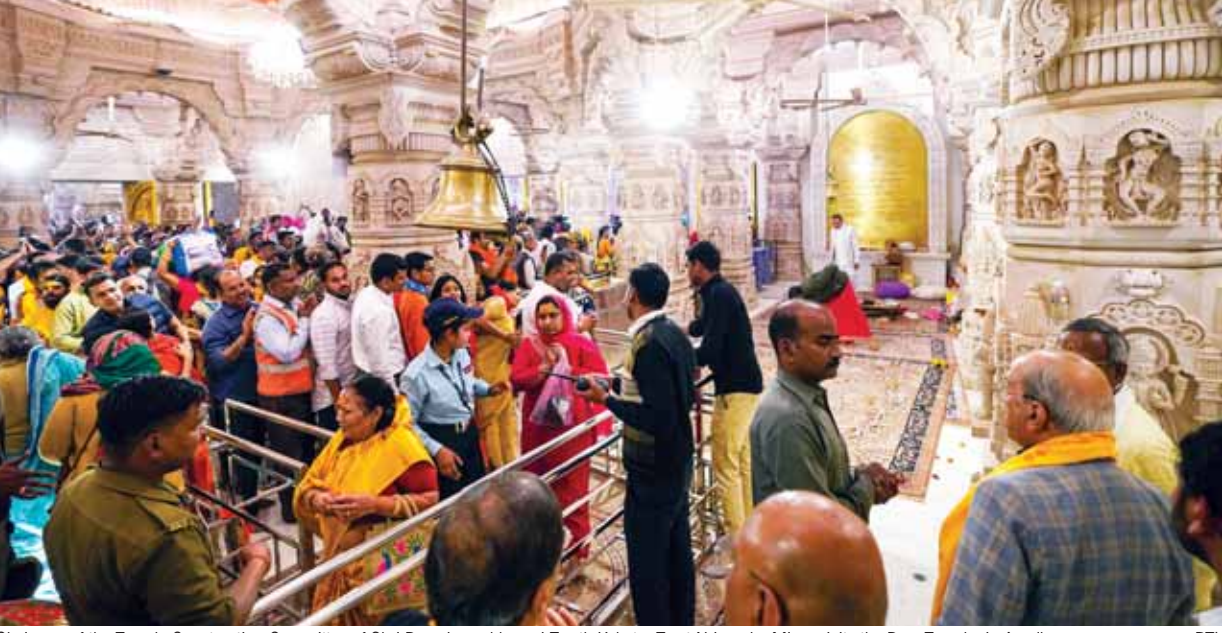
# Ram mandir becomes third highest-earning religious shrine in India

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■  
AYODHYA

Ayodhya, the city of Lord Ram, is witnessing an unprecedented surge in the number of pilgrims and tourists, setting new records daily.

The Ram Temple has now emerged as the third-highest revenue-generating religious shrine in India, surpassing famous temples like the Golden Temple, Vaishno Devi, and Shirdi Sai Baba Temple in annual earnings. Since the consecration of Ram Lalla on January 22, more than 130 Million devotees and tourists have visited Ayodhya. The temple's annual revenue has now crossed ₹700 Crore.

Ayodhya's rapid transformation is playing a significant role in boosting not just the economy of Uttar Pradesh but also the nation's economy. Currently, the daily influx of devotees and tourists ranges between two to five lakh, creating challenges in providing seamless darshan and accommodation. The surge in visitors has propelled the Ram Temple into the list of India's top ten religious shrines in terms of donations, securing the third position.



Chairman of the Temple Construction Committee of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust Nripendra Misra visits the Ram Temple, in Ayodhya PTI

A large number of devotees offer donations in cash as well as gold and silver to the temple. According to Prof Vinod Srivastava, General Secretary of the Uttar Pradesh-Uttarakhand Economic Association, a study and estimation indicate that in the financial year 2024-25, the Tirupati Venkateswara Temple

in Andhra Pradesh is expected to generate annual donations of approximately ₹1,500-1,650 Crore. The Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Kerala holds the second position, with an estimated annual collection of ₹750-850 Crore. The surge in pilgrims arriving in Ayodhya has also led to

record-breaking donations. Following their holy dip at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, millions of devotees have been flocking to the Ram Temple. On an average day, around four lakh devotees offer prayers at the temple, a trend that has continued since Makar Sankranti. Prakash Gupta, the in-charge of

the temple trust office, stated that the trust's ten donation counters are collectively receiving contributions exceeding ₹10 Lakh per day. Estimates suggest that in just one month of the Maha Kumbh, over ₹5 Crore has been collected in donations, including offerings made in the six donation boxes placed

## India's Top Revenue-Generating Temples (Annual Revenue in Crores)

1. Tirupati Venkateswara Temple, Andhra Pradesh - ₹1,500-1,650 Crore
2. Padmanabhaswamy Temple, Kerala - ₹750-850 Crore
3. Ram Temple, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh - ₹700 Crore
4. Golden Temple, Punjab - ₹650 Crore
5. Vaishno Devi Temple, Jammu & Kashmir - ₹600 Crore
6. Shirdi Sai Baba Temple, Maharashtra - ₹500 Crore
7. Jagannath Temple, Puri, Odisha - ₹400 Crore
8. Akshardham Temple, New Delhi - ₹200-250 Crore
9. Somnath Temple, Gujarat - ₹150-200 Crore



SGPC President Harjinder Singh Dhahi addresses media regarding his resignation from the post, in Amritsar PTI

# Harjinder Singh Dhahi steps down as SGPC president

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Harjinder Singh Dhahi, resigned from his post with immediate effect on Monday.

Dhahi's resignation came days after Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Ragbir Singh strongly condemned the dismissal of services of Giani Harpreet Singh as the jathedar of Damdama Sahib by the SGPC.

Dhahi said he is always committed to the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of Sikhs. Referring to a February 13 Facebook post of Jathedar Ragbir Singh on the termination of services of Giani Harpreet Singh, Dhahi said he wrote that removing the latter was "highly condemnable" and "unfortunate".

"I being 'pardhan' (president of SGPC) take responsibility and resign from the post on moral grounds with immediate effect," he said while addressing the media in Amritsar.

Dhahi also said he has written to the Akal Takht Jathedar to relieve him from his position in the seven-member committee formed to supervise the new membership drive of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).

On February 13, Giani Ragbir Singh in a Facebook post condemned the dismissal of services of Harpreet Singh as the jathedar of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib in Bathinda. In the post, he said Giani Harpreet Singh's removal was "highly condemnable" and "unfortunate" which will harm the independent existence of the 'Takht Sahibs'.

On December 10, the SGPC had dismissed the services of Giani Harpreet Singh as the jathedar of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib in Bathinda. The decision was taken during an executive committee meeting of the SGPC.

The committee accepted a report by a three-member committee formed to probe the allegations against Giani Harpreet Singh in an 18-year-old domestic dispute matter.

# Adhikari, four others suspended from Bengal Assembly

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Following alleged unruly scenes inside the State Assembly Speaker Biman Bandopadhyay on Monday suspended Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari and three other MLAs for the rest of the Budget Session or for 30 days "whichever is earlier," leading the entire battery of the saffron legislators to stage a walkout on the issue.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership said that if the Speaker would not withdraw his suspension then the party would boycott Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's speech in the House. Banerjee is scheduled to deliver her speech on Tuesday.

"If there is no Opposition Leader in the House then, the BJP will boycott the Chief Minister," Adhikari said adding in that case he would deliver his speech

at the gate of the Assembly. The other legislators who were suspended are Agnimitra Paul, Bankim Ghosh and Biswanath Karik. The Opposition Leader subsequently said that Karik was suspended though he was not present in the scene.

The Monday's fracas started after an adjournment motion brought by BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul to highlight the incidents of disruption of Sarswati Puja at many places in the State earlier this month.

After Paul read out her speech the BJP demanded discussion on the matter alleging that many places the organisers had received threats for organising Saraswati Puja and in some places either they even had to perform the Pujas with police protection after obtaining order from the Calcutta High Court.

When the Speaker disallowed the discussion the BJP MLAs

descended in the well shouting slogans and they even tore off the minutes, inside sources said. The Speaker subsequently suspended the four MLAs. This is the fourth time when Adhikari has been suspended.

Referring to the disruption of Sarswati Puja - which organised throughout the State every year on Basant Panchami day - Adhikari referred to how the students of the Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri Law College in South Kolkata had to perform the Puja with police protection which was obtained through an order of the Calcutta High Court.

A former Trinamool Congress Chattr Parishad leader Shabir Ali had allegedly threatened the students of JCLC with dire consequences if they performed the Puja inside the college leading the students to move the High Court seeking police protection. A similar situation allegedly occurred

inside a school in South 24 Parganas where the headmaster of the school had to abandon the Puja after receiving threats from the local toughies.

The BJP had been raising the issue for the past several days. A section of the TMC leadership however said that the faceoff in the JCLC had no communal angle as it was an affair between the two groups of the party's students' arm.

"Shabir backed by a local MP wanted to control the affairs of the Puja himself while the rival group backed by another TMC leader wanted to retain its sway this led to the face-off," said a professor, adding "it is only about controlling the huge money that is raised from the Puja and has nothing to do with any communal angle.

Meanwhile, the BJP is planning to take out processions against the Speaker's order, sources said.

# Four dead as SUV heading to Maha Kumbh overturns in MP



PTI ■ SIDHI (MP)

Four persons were killed, and as many others sustained injuries after an SUV heading for the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj overturned in Madhya

Pradesh's Sidhi district in the wee hours of Monday, police said.

The accident occurred under the Amahia police station limits around 2 am when the SUV was going towards Prayagraj from Waidhan in Singrauli district, Superintendent of Police (SP) Ravindra Verma said.

He said the vehicle carrying pilgrims was crossing Mudha Pahad when it overturned, killing four persons.

Four other passengers were seriously injured and are undergoing treatment at a hospital, the official said.

Prima facie, it appears that the driver lost control of the vehicle while negotiating a turn, he said.

# Gurugram RERA imposes ₹50 Lakh fine on Birla Estates

STAFF REPORTER ■  
GURUGRAM



The Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) Gurugram, has imposed a heavy penalty of ₹50 Lakh on real estate promoter M/s Birla Estates Private Limited for violation of Section 3 of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act 2016.

Section 3 of the Act states that no promoter shall advertise without registering the project.

The promoter had applied for the registration of its upcoming real estate group housing colony named Birla Akira located at Sector 31 and 32-A, Gurugram under Section 4 of the RERA Act 2016.

The advertisement was published by the promoter while documents of the project were still under scrutiny at the Authority and registration certificate was awaited.

The Authority order said, "The registration certificate (RC) shall be issued after submission of remaining deficiencies, online DPI and deposit of ₹50 Lakh penalty for violation of Section 3 of the Act, 2016."

The Authority repeatedly warned the promoter of legal consequences and had issued a show cause notice to the promoter for violation of the Act.

"The promoter M/s Birla

Estates Pvt Ltd is again advised not to indulge in or allow any other entity for sale of units in unregistered projects failing which legal consequences shall follow," said the Authority order.

The Authority also penalised Godrej Developers and Properties LLP, Signature Global Homes Private Limited, Shine Buildcon Pvt Ltd and AMB Infraventures Pvt Ltd for non-compliance of timeline provided under Section 4(2)(l)(C) of the Act 2016 of ₹25 Lakh each.

It is worth noting Section 4(2)(l)(C) of the Act clearly states that the promoter shall abide by its declarations.

For non-compliance of RERA registration conditions, the Authority also ordered the forfeiture of security deposits of six promoters such as M/s 1000 Trees Housing Pvt Ltd, M/s Keystone World Pvt Ltd, M/s JMK Holdings Pvt Ltd, M/s TARC Ltd, M/s Mapsko Builders Pvt Ltd and M/s Aviana Green Estates Pvt Ltd totalling and amount of ₹2.25 Crore.

RERA Authority Gurugram is committed to protecting the interests of homebuyers and ensuring the timely completion of real estate projects. The authority will continue to take strict action against developers who fail to meet their obligations under the RERA Act.

# Meitei body appeals for restoring democratic rule in Manipur

PTI ■ IMPHAL

The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (CCOMI), an umbrella body of several Imphal-based civil society organisations of the Meiteis, on Monday urged Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla to help establish a "duly elected government within this month" in the state which is under President's Rule.

In a memorandum to the governor, the CCOMI sought his immediate intervention to address the ongoing crisis that has severely impacted the political, social and economic stability of the state.

President's rule was imposed in Manipur and the assembly put under suspended animation on the evening of February 13, days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his post.

Biren Singh, who was heading the BJP-led government in Manipur since 2017, resigned as chief minister after nearly 21 months of ethnic violence that has claimed over 250 lives so far since May 2023.

"The people of Manipur are in dire need of clarity and assurance from the highest consti-



The members of the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity File Photo

tutional authority of the state regarding the current political and constitutional status," CCOMI Convenor K Athouba after meeting Bhalla, told reporters in front of the

Raj Bhavan. He said that during the meeting, they requested the governor to convey an official message to the citizens, outlining the government's immediate

plan to restore normalcy and uphold law and order. "We submitted a memorandum to the governor in which CCOMI urged him to establish a duly elected gov-

ernment within this month to ensure democratic governance and effective decision-making," Athouba said.

A full-fledged assembly session needs to be convened to deliberate on the crisis and formulate necessary legal and administrative measures for resolution, he said.

"The CCOMI also sought immediate measures to provide security for all affected villages and amnesty for their civilian village defence forces, for opening of national highways and ensuring smooth transportation of essential commodities" Athouba added.

A comprehensive initiative must be undertaken to identify, dismantle, and evict all illegal villages that have sprung up across the state, threatening its demographic and environmental integrity, Athouba said.

"All violent activities and unauthorised movement of armed groups must be brought to a complete halt to ensure peace and stability," he said.

The organisation also demanded that the administration implement NRC in the state and dismantle camps of militant groups.

# MP CM urges urban bodies to boost revenue

PTI ■ INDORE

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Monday stressed that urban bodies must become financially self-reliant and said that if their revenue increases, the government's public welfare programmes can be implemented better.

Addressing a meeting of the state unit of the All India Council of Mayors here through video conference, Yadav said urban bodies play an important role in strengthening democracy, and the state government will take every possible step for development based on suggestions of the mayors.

"We will be happy when urban bodies stand on their feet (financially) and run on their systems," he said, adding that urban bodies will have to find new sources of income to increase their revenue.

The chief minister said if urban bodies become financially self-reliant through revenue increase, the government's public welfare schemes can be implemented better. He also praised the Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) for raising ₹244 Crore to construct a solar power plant by introducing green bonds as a public issue, urging other urban bodies to adopt this step as a model.

Yadav said the number of seats is likely to increase in the upcoming delimitation of the Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies, and the process will also affect the urban bodies.

State Urban Administration and Housing Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya said mayors will have to take "bold steps" to make urban bodies financially self-reliant.

He asked mayors to present the details of income and expenditure of their urban bodies in a transparent manner to the citizens.

He said full recovery of dues should be done by imposing appropriate taxes on the public.

# Lost dog finds way back home to Agra family after 104 days

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ AGRA

What was supposed to be a memorable trip to the Taj Mahal turned into a heart-breaking ordeal for Dipayan and Kasturi Ghosh of Gurugram. Their beloved pet dog, a Himachali Desi Grey Hound, went missing from their hotel, plunging the couple into days of despair and relentless searching. After 104 days of unwavering hope and effort, their beloved pet was finally found.

Dipayan, an Air India officer, and his wife Kasturi, originally from Vasant Kunj, Delhi, arrived in Agra on November 1, 2024. They checked into Hotel Taj View on Fatehabad Road with their two beloved pet dogs. On November 3, they left for Fatehpur Sikri,



entrusting their pets to the hotel staff. However, tragedy struck when their native breed Grey Hound went missing at around 11:30 AM.

The devastated couple accused the hotel management of negligence and immediately launched a search operation. Posters were pasted across the Tajganj area, CCTV footage was reviewed, and a case was registered at Tajganj Police Station. Despite offering a

reward of ₹50,000 for any clues, the dog remained missing for over three months.

With heavy hearts, the couple eventually returned home, but their search never ceased. They visited Agra every week, praying for their pet's safe return. Then, a breakthrough came after 104 days - a local guide spotted a dog resembling theirs roaming in Mehtab Bagh. He shared a video, and to their amazement, their beloved Grey Hound was visible.

On Saturday, the couple rushed to Mehtab Bagh. Volunteers and hotel staff joined in the search, but the dog remained hidden in the thick bushes. Undeterred, they waited patiently at a nearby tea stall. Hours later, at around 4 PM, the Grey Hound cautiously emerged. Overwhelmed with

emotion, Kasturi called out to it. The dog hesitated at first but, recognizing his owners, ran towards them.

Tears streamed down their faces as they saw the dog's frail condition it had grown thin, its bones visible from days of starvation. But the reunion was nothing short of a miracle. The couple immediately took the Grey Hound to a vet for a check-up and vowed to nurse it back to health.

**More than just a pet**

For Dipayan and Kasturi, their Grey Hound is not just a dog - it is family. Kasturi had rescued it a decade ago when it was sick and abandoned. Since then, it had been their loyal companion, sleeping beside them and sharing their joys and sorrows. Losing it felt like losing a part of themselves.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Heart-wrenching

The New Delhi Railway Station stampede exposes administrative lapses and highlights the need for better crowd control

It is as heart-wrenching as it is unfortunate. The stampede at New Delhi Railway Station has shocked the Capital. At least 18 people, including five children, lost their lives, and over a dozen sustained injuries in a horrific stampede at the Station on Saturday night. The tragedy unfolded on the foot-overbridges connecting platforms 14 and 15, as a sudden surge of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj resulted in a deadly crush. The incident raises critical questions about mismanagement, infrastructural inadequacies and lapses in crowd control that led to the catastrophe. The primary trigger of the incident appears to be a confluence of factors, including excessive passenger load, misleading announcements and poor crowd management. The surge of pilgrims traveling to Prayagraj for the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela significantly increased the footfall at the station. Reports indicate that around 1,500 general tickets were being sold every hour. Sources suggest that a wrong announcement regarding a change of platforms may have led to confusion among passengers.



In the ensuing rush, some individuals slipped while descending the foot-overbridge stairs, triggering widespread panic. Besides, extended waiting periods for departing trains may have resulted in a bottleneck effect. While overcrowding was an expected challenge, poor planning and mismanagement turned it into a disaster. Given the predictable surge of passengers, railway authorities failed to deploy adequate personnel to regulate the movement of people. Despite previous incidents highlighting the risks of overcrowding, no significant upgrades had been made to ensure smoother pedestrian movement. Moreover, the response from railway officials and security personnel was reportedly delayed. A more robust system to alert and manage surging crowds could have prevented the incident from escalating into a full-fledged disaster. Could this have been prevented? Surely. Deployment of additional railway police and personnel during peak travel periods could have averted the disaster. Besides, real-time monitoring of passenger density using surveillance cameras and AI-based crowd control systems could have definitely helped in such situations. This stampede must jolt the authorities from their deep slumber as this is not for the first time such a tragedy has happened. Expansion and widening of foot-overbridges to accommodate high passenger traffic must be done on priority. Clear and accurate digital signage to minimise confusion is also very important. Besides, there must be a system to cap the number of the general tickets issued per hour, especially during mega events. While accountability is being fixed, the focus must remain on implementing long-term solutions to prevent such tragedies in the future. The railway authorities must ensure that infrastructure, security and operational protocols are robust enough to handle high footfall scenarios safely.

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### PICTALK



A flock of ibis flying over a paddy field, in Nagaon

# Delhi High Court reinstates fraud claims against Reliance



PRASHANT TEWARI

The Delhi High Court quashes an international arbitration award that had dismissed government claims of 'insidious fraud' and 'unjust enrichment' against Reliance Industries

The resounding victory of the Central Government's legal team, led by the Attorney General of India A.R. Venkatramani reinforced by the active participation of the eminent jurist and the former Attorney General of India KK Venugopal, under the astute administrative guidance of Union Petroleum & Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, in the Delhi High Court verdict against Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL), has decisively dismantled allegations of favouritism levelled against the Modi government.

This landmark ruling categorically refutes opposition claims that the government promotes select business houses, reaffirming its commitment to transparency, fairness, and the rule of law in corporate governance and policy-making. In a landmark judgment dated February 14, 2025, the Delhi High Court delivered a decisive verdict in the case of Union of India vs Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL), addressing long-standing allegations of crony capitalism and favouritism towards major industrialists by the current government.

This 79-page judgment not only exonerates the government from accusations of bias but also underscores the integrity of India's judicial system and the competence of its political and legal leadership. Background of the Case The dispute centres around the Production Sharing Contract (PSC) executed between the Union of India and Reliance Industries Ltd. in 2000, about the exploration and extraction of natural gas in the Krishna-Godavari basin.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas alleged that RIL had engaged in "unjust enrichment" by extracting and selling gas that had purportedly migrated from fields operated by the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) to RIL's adjacent block. The government sought compensation, contending that RIL's actions resulted in significant financial losses to the state exchequer. Details of Judgement The Delhi High Court's single judge judgment in Union of India vs. Reliance Industries Ltd. examined the allegations of unjust enrichment, contractual breaches, and fraud against RIL, ultimately dismissing them due to a lack of concrete evidence.



ment, contractual breaches, and fraud against RIL, ultimately dismissing them due to a lack of concrete evidence. The court upheld the findings of the international arbitration tribunal, reaffirming that RIL operated within the bounds of the Production Sharing Contract (PSC) and could not be held liable for natural gas migration beyond its control.

However, the Division Bench of the Delhi High Court has quashed an arbitral award that had dismissed the Central Government's claims against Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and its foreign partners. The government had accused the conglomerate of "insidious fraud" and "unjust enrichment" amounting to over \$1.729 billion by allegedly extracting natural gas from deposits beyond its entitlement. The Bench, comprising Justices Rekha Palli and Saurabh Banerjee, overturned the ruling of a single judge, who had, in May 2022, set aside the Petroleum Ministry's allegations. The court determined that the international arbitration award dated July 24, 2018, which had favoured the RIL-led consortium, was "contrary to public policy" in India. This decision marks a significant legal setback for RIL, as it reinstates the gov-



THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS ALLEGED THAT RIL HAD ENGAGED IN 'UNJUST ENRICHMENT' BY EXTRACTING AND SELLING GAS THAT HAD PURPORTEDLY MIGRATED FROM FIELDS OPERATED BY THE STATE-OWNED OIL AND NATURAL GAS CORPORATION (ONGC) TO RIL'S ADJACENT BLOCK

ernment's claims concerning unauthorised gas extraction. The ruling also strengthens the government's position in regulatory disputes within the oil and gas sector. With the arbitral award nullified, the matter may now proceed further in Indian courts, potentially leading to fresh legal battles over financial liabilities and resource allocation in the country's hydrocarbon sector. Beyond the legal nuances, the judgment serves as a crucial precedent for future contracts, emphasising the importance of precision in drafting and adherence to arbitration mechanisms for dispute resolution. It underscores the independence of the judiciary in adjudicating disputes involving powerful corporate entities and government bodies, dispelling claims of crony capitalism. The case also highlights the competence of the central government's legal representation, particularly the diligence of Attorney General AR Venkatramani and Union Petroleum & Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in defending the government's stance. It further reflects the abysmally woeful performance of the RIL legal team in defending the case. Furthermore, the ruling reassures investors about India's

commitment to the rule of law, ensuring that legal processes remain transparent and evidence-driven. By challenging the political narrative of undue favouritism towards industrialists, the judgment reinforces the integrity of India's governance, corporate regulations, and media responsibility in shaping public discourse.

**Conclusion** The Delhi High Court's latest judgment in Union of India vs Reliance Industries Ltd. is a testament to the robustness of India's legal system and its capacity to adjudicate high-stakes disputes impartially. It dispels allegations of governmental bias towards prominent industrialists, affirming that decisions are grounded in evidence and legal merit. The ruling also underscores the importance of adhering to contractual obligations and the role of arbitration in resolving intricate commercial conflicts. As India continues to navigate its path towards economic growth, this judgment reinforces the principles of fairness, transparency, and the rule of law as cornerstones of its democratic ethos.

(The writer is a prominent columnist and Public Policy Expert; the views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### US CRITICISES EUROPEAN LEADERS

Madam — At the 61st Munich Security Conference, American Vice President JD Vance left no stone unturned in reprimanding and threatening the European leaders. He has launched a monstrous attack on Europe, in which he has accused its leaders of failing to give free speech, restricting illegal migration, and living in fear of religious ideology. He has put the biggest threat to Europe's security on the European countries themselves. Along with this, he also said that the European countries do not pay the full price for their security. America will no longer provide security to Europe with closed eyes. This simply means that Donald Trump has indicated that if the NATO organisation has to be run, then it will have to be run on Trump's terms, or else America will leave that organisation.

America has also indicated that it wants to see Russia back in the G-7 countries' organisation. The White House has already announced that it will impose additional tariffs on goods imported from countries around the world. Now the rest of the world, especially the European Union, will have to decide without any delay how they will learn to live without America. Before America leaves NATO, the campaign to expel it will have to be intensified. Also, every possible help will have to be given to Ukraine to save it from the clutches of Russian terrorism. Because Trump is completely determined to hand over the reins of Ukraine to the Kremlin.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

### HOPES HIGH FOR TROPHY

Madam— This refers to your caption in Sunday Pioneer, "Rohit, Kohli lead Team India for Champions Trophy". Indeed, it was a brilliant century from skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli against Bangladesh in the ICC Champions Trophy opener while I occupied the studio box as a special guest from which I was witnessing the

### Stampede at New Delhi Railway Station



The stampede incident at New Delhi Railway Station claimed 15 innocent lives, but it also serves as a warning that the time for change has arrived. Chaos, lack of crowd control and failure of security measures led to this tragedy. It is now essential that we learn from this incident and take steps to prevent such occurrences in the future. This disaster has made it clear that the railway must adopt modern strategies for crowd

management and passenger safety. The railway administration should anticipate potential crowds during major events and pilgrimages and make appropriate arrangements in advance. By utilising new technologies, entry and exit points should be better organised to ensure smooth passenger movement. The government has expressed condolences over the incident, and Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav has ordered a high-level inquiry. However, beyond this, we must take proactive steps with a positive mindset to prioritise passenger safety. By improving traffic management, deploying adequate police forces and making the information system more effective, we can prevent such incidents.

R K Jain | Barwani

match. The entire box was surrounded by the players' family, and I can see all the cheers in Anushka Sharma and Rohit's wife.

The recent rule of restrictions has not permitted the player's family to join them for this tour. When my opinion about Rohit and Virat has been changing while watching them play, there came a strong pat behind my back, which brought me to reality. Oh, it all happened in my dreams that I woke up to my wife's call and went for a quick shower and to get ready to start at my office. Hitman and Kohli thus became the dream object in fans lives, and I am also one among those impacted much by their failures. One hopes that both will come good in the upcoming Champions Trophy.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

### MSMES MUST REINVENT TO SHINE

Madam — The US's push for reciprocal tariffs, framed as a 'fair trade' corrective, has sent shockwaves through global markets—but for India's MSMEs

industry, this moment could be less about survival and more about reinvention. Critics argue that this move will spark a trade war, hobbling economic growth and benefiting no one. However, for India's MSME sector, this moment could be a catalyst for transformation. By upgrading to world-class standards at affordable costs, Indian MSMEs can tap into vast export markets and become more competitive, resilient and export-ready.

This would require a multi-pronged approach, involving government incentives, technology transfers, and skill development programmes. By doing so, India can turn a potential trade threat into a transformative opportunity, ultimately boosting its economic growth and global trade prospects and proving that even in the midst of tariff wars, MSMEs can shine as stars of innovation and growth.

Shruti Sagar | Pune

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## India advances carbon market reforms following COP 29

India, already a leader in renewable energy, reinforced its commitment to climate action by proposing a unified carbon market

The 29th Conference of the Parties (COP 29) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) concluded in Baku, Azerbaijan, on November 24, 2024. While key expectations regarding climate finance remained unmet, significant progress was achieved in carbon market regulations. A landmark agreement on carbon trading rules was reached, aiming to accelerate climate action by enabling countries to meet their emission reduction goals efficiently and cost-effectively. Under its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the country initially aimed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensity by 33-35 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030, later revising this target to 45 per cent in 2022. India has launched multiple initiatives to combat climate change. On the supply side, renewable energy generation helps mitigate carbon footprints, while demand-side initiatives like Perform-Achieve-Trade (PAT), star labeling, energy conservation building codes, and improved lighting solu-



tions further reinforce India's climate commitments. Existing frameworks, including Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) and Energy Saving Certificates (ESCs), serve as a foundation. These were introduced under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008 and have been successfully traded on Indian power exchanges. RECs drive renewable energy adoption by allowing obligated entities to purchase either renewable energy or its certificates. One REC equates to 1 MWh of renewable energy generated from sources like solar, wind, hydro, and biogas. This system benefits both electricity generators and buyers, ensuring environmental compliance. Similarly, ESCs promote energy efficiency by enabling designated energy-intensive

industries to either enhance energy savings or buy corresponding certificates. One ESCert represents a reduction of 1 million tonnes of oil equivalent energy. Currently, 13 key industrial sectors, including aluminum, cement, power distribution, and railways, participate in this program, covering nearly 50 per cent of India's primary energy consumption. Since their inception, RECs and ESCerts have driven significant emissions reductions, saving over 73 million tonnes of CO2 through REC trading and preventing 106 million tonnes of CO2 emissions via ESCerts. Recognising the need for a unified carbon market, India proposed a comprehensive system merging RECs and ESCerts into a single, internationally aligned framework. The regulatory foundation was set with the amendment of the Energy Conservation Act in January 2023, followed by the notification of the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, 2023. The scheme designates the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission as the market regulator and power exchanges as trading plat-

forms, while the Bureau of Energy Efficiency oversees compliance mechanisms. India's carbon market will consist of two segments: a compliance market and an offset market. The compliance market will impose emission caps on obligated entities, allowing overachievers to sell surplus carbon credits to underachievers. The offset market will enable voluntary participation by non-obligated entities aiming to reduce their carbon footprints. Carbon credit certificates will be traded through a regulated bidding process. The transition from existing REC and ESCert markets to a unified carbon trading system is expected to be seamless, given India's well-established power exchanges and transaction mechanisms. With this development, India moves closer to integrating its climate action efforts into global carbon markets, reinforcing its commitment to reducing emissions and achieving long-term sustainability goals.

(The writer works with Indian Institute of Management, Sirmaur; views are personal)



ATUL AGRAWAL

**FIRST COLUMN**  
**RAISING GEN ALPHA AND GEN BETA**

To ensure their well-being, parents must strike a balance between traditional values and modern approaches



SHAINY SHARMA

The 21st century has introduced new challenges and opportunities in parenting. As we raise Generation Alpha (born 2012-2024) and Generation Beta (born 2025-2039), it is crucial to adapt parenting strategies to their digital upbringing, rapid technological advancements and changing societal norms. Ensuring these children grow up healthy, happy, and disciplined requires a balance of traditional values and modern approaches. There is no denying that, unlike previous generations, Generation Alpha and Generation Beta are growing up with easy access to technology, which affects their lifestyle habits. It is of utmost importance that parents/guardians take proactive steps to ensure their children's well-being such as providing balanced nutrition such as a diet rich in proteins, vitamins, and fibres while limiting processed foods and sugary snacks; reducing screen time and promoting physical activities such as cycling, swimming, and team sports to improve fitness and social skills; setting screen-free bedtime routines to ensure quality sleep, which is crucial for the cognitive and emotional development and encouraging children to spend time offline by engaging in hands-on activities like painting, gardening and DIY projects.



Not only these, but in an era of social media influence and fast-paced lifestyles, parents/guardians need to support their children by creating a strong emotional connection; encouraging resilience and a growth mindset; guiding them in reducing digital overload, and engaging them in mindful activities such as yoga, meditation, journaling, or simple relaxation exercises to help them cope with stress. Above all, what matters the most is the art of discipline. With instant gratification becoming a norm in the digital age, parents/guardians must realise that these generations will grow up in an AI-driven world, requiring skills beyond academics. Parents/Guardians can help prepare them by encouraging critical thinking and creativity and providing problem-solving challenges, STEM activities, and artistic outlets along with proper guidance on responsible internet usage, cybersecurity, and online ethics followed by developing social skills in a hybrid world. Raising healthy, happy, and disciplined Gen Alpha and Gen Beta children requires a thoughtful blend of love, guidance, and adaptability. Parents/Guardians must embrace new-age parenting by integrating digital awareness with traditional values while fostering emotional resilience and self-discipline. By prioritising wellbeing, education and strong moral foundations, one can ensure these generations grow into responsible, fulfilled, and future-ready individuals. Also, by providing proper nutrition, encouraging physical and mental well-being, fostering social skills, and setting positive examples, parents/guardians can create an environment where children thrive for it is aptly said that a happy and healthy child is not just the result of luck but of consistent efforts, care, and understanding from those who nurture them. By promoting healthy habits, setting strong moral foundations, and nurturing adaptability, parents can equip their children for a fast-evolving world. Ultimately, a happy and well-rounded child is shaped not by chance, but by consistent love, guidance, and understanding.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

# Unlocking nature's secrets: A journey through India's forests

Nature is an open book, rich with stories waiting to be uncovered. There are intricate connections between land, life, and time, write BKP Sinha & Arvind Jha

Nature, in its boundless complexity, holds countless wonders and mysteries. A walk through the forest offers a unique opportunity to engage deeply with the natural world, observing its intricate details and uncovering its hidden stories. Every tree, rock, and animal track contributes to the landscape's rich history, revealing the dynamic processes that have shaped it over time. The towering trees, with their rings cataloguing centuries of climatic shifts and environmental changes, stand as silent witnesses to the passage of time. A noticeable absence of middle-aged trees, for example, often points to a past forest fire. These fires, while natural and sometimes devastating, selectively eliminate younger trees while leaving behind older, more resilient ones. India, with its diverse ecosystems ranging from coastal regions to mountain valleys, offers a unique opportunity to observe the intricate relationships between flora, fauna, and their environment. Even the soil beneath our feet, a mosaic of organic matter, testifies to the endless cycle of life and decay that sustains the ecosystem. The contours of the land, the steepness of slopes, the presence of valleys and ridges – these are not mere accidents of geography. They are the fingerprints of geological forces, millennia in the making. The Himalayas, Western Ghats, and Vindhya ranges are iconic examples of such geological artistry, showcasing the dynamic processes that have shaped the nation's landscape and influenced its biodiversity. The forest is a timeless classroom, where nature's lessons unfold with every step. But to truly unlock these secrets, requires more than a casual glance; it demands a mindful approach and willingness to slow down and truly engage with our surroundings. As you walk through the forest, you'll notice the forest floor is covered with a thick layer of leaves, twigs, and decomposing organic matter. This layer, known as the leaf litter, plays a crucial role in nutrient cycling and provides a habitat for many small creatures. The type and distribution of vegetation provide insights into the region's climate, soil conditions, and water availability. Lush rainforests, like those in the Western Ghats and Northeast India, thrive in areas with abundant rainfall. These verdant ecosystems boast a rich variety of plant species, from towering trees to intricate understory plants, each adapted to thrive in the humid, water-rich environment. This dense vegetation supports a wide range of wildlife, contributing to the region's biodiversity and ecological stability. In contrast, the arid deserts of Rajasthan present a landscape where life has remarkably adapted to survive with minimal water. Vegetation here is sparse, but highly specialized, with species like cacti, acacias, and thorny bushes dominating the terrain. These species are equipped with unique adaptations, such as water-storing tissues and deep root systems, allowing them to conserve and access water efficiently and ensuring their survival in such harsh conditions. The intimate relationship between plants and their environment becomes even more evident when observing specific species in particular areas. For instance, in floodplains, trees such as sycamore, Gular, and ash Gurjan thrive in fertile, wet conditions where water and nutrients



accumulate. On the other hand, the hardy Casuarina is well-suited to coastal environments, where the salty conditions pose a challenge for many other species, including Karanj (Pongamia). Similarly, along riverbanks, trees like Jamun and Arjun flourish in the constantly wet conditions, highlighting how plant life reflects the local ecosystem. Just as plant life reflects environmental conditions, rock formations provide a window into the geological history and processes that have shaped the land. Sedimentary rocks, often rich in marine fossils such as shells, corals, and fish, indicate that the region was once submerged underwater. These rocks may also display ripple marks or mud cracks, further supporting the presence of ancient water bodies. For example, the fossil-rich Shivalik Hills provide a glimpse into prehistoric times, showcasing the variety of life forms that once thrived in the area. The types of sediment and their layering can also offer insights into past climate conditions, such as periods of drought or heavy rainfall. For instance, fine-grained sediments suggest calm, shallow waters, while coarser sediments point to more turbulent conditions. Igneous rocks, formed from cooled magma, reveal the area's volcanic history, while metamorphic rocks provide evidence of the intense transformations that occur deep within the Earth. Understanding the geology beneath the surface, which shapes the land, is equally important, and soil reveals much about this. For example, limestone regions, where rock weathering creates caves and stone pillars, typically have alkaline soils high in calcium. Conversely, granite-dominated areas, where rock breakdown leads to acidic soils, often develop wetlands due to poor drainage. Soil colour offers further clues: Dark brown soil, rich in organic matter, supports diverse ecosystems; grey soil suggests wetter conditions; yellowish soil may indicate nutrient depletion. Dramatic shifts in soil colour often point to human influence. For example, in Karnataka and

Odisha, vibrant red and ochre hues reflect historical iron ore mining. In Rajasthan and Gujarat, white caps on the soil signal high salt levels from over-irrigation. Physical signs in the landscape—such as fissures or cracks in the soil—can indicate instability, caused by factors like erosion, seismic activity, or human intervention. In hilly regions like the Western Ghats or Himalayas, slipping or bending tree bark may signal shifting ground, a clear indicator of potential soil movement. Recognizing these signs is crucial for the safety of campers and hikers. Water bodies, including rivers, lakes, and wetlands, are vital components of India's ecosystems and are deeply intertwined with the land's geology. Major rivers such as Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Godavari are true lifelines for the nation. The Ganges River, revered as sacred, flows over 2,500 kilometres across northern India, supporting numerous aquatic and terrestrial species. Its waters irrigate fields that feed millions, and it is a critical source of drinking water for countless communities. Similarly, the Brahmaputra River, originating from the Tibetan Himalayas, meanders through Northeast India, sustaining rich floodplain ecosystems and supplying water for agriculture and hydropower. The Godavari, often called the "Dakshin Ganga," flows through central India, nourishing one of the largest river basins in the country and supporting diverse habitats. India's wetlands, such as the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, span the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta and are a haven for Bengal tigers, crocodiles, birds, and other wildlife, while its mangroves protect the coastline from storms and floods. As we explore these natural habitats, subtle signs like paw prints, droppings, and other traces offer glimpses into animals' presence and activities. Each animal leaves a distinct signature reflecting its unique anatomy and behaviour. For example, cats,

with their stealthy grace, leave tracks showcasing the soft pads of their paws, devoid of sharp imprints of their retractable claws, hinting at their elusive nature. Rabbits, in contrast, leave bounding tracks with hind legs landing ahead of their forelegs, showcasing their hurried movements and vulnerability. Understanding these signs provides deeper insights into wildlife behaviour and habitat preferences. Like us, animals are drawn to places that offer the essentials of life: food, water, and shelter. A patch of trees followed by an open field and a water source, such as a lake or pond, indicates a popular spot for wildlife. However, animals in these areas are often cautious and aware of their surroundings. They possess an innate ability to detect and avoid human presence long before we notice them, typically only breaking cover to make a quick escape. Birds, in particular, use vocalizations to mark territory and alert others to predators. For instance, the sudden flight of pigeons on a quiet woodland path can trigger a group warning system, notifying nearby animals—deer, rabbits, and foxes—of a potential threat. Similarly, a chorus of noisy bird calls may indicate a coordinated defence against a predator, such as a crow mobbing an owl. Birds also emit sharp alarm calls, like the high-pitched "seet," specifically designed to warn others of a bird of prey overhead. It is in paying close attention to these subtle cues that we begin to truly understand the richness of the natural world. The next time we find ourselves amidst the whispers of the woods, let us listen closely. The forest invites us to unlock its wisdom, learn from its resilience, and contribute to its legacy. By embracing the profound lessons found within the diverse elements of the forest, we not only enrich our own lives but also ensure that this invaluable library remains open for generations to come. (The writers are former principal chief conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra; views are their own)

THE GANGES RIVER, REVERED AS SACRED, FLOWS OVER 2,500 KILOMETRES ACROSS NORTHERN INDIA, SUPPORTING NUMEROUS AQUATIC AND TERRESTRIAL SPECIES. ITS WATERS IRRIGATE FIELDS THAT FEED MILLIONS.

## The rise of religious realty: How India's infrastructure push is transforming spiritual tourism

This emerging sector is transforming pilgrimage sites with upscale hospitality and commercial developments, meeting the needs of faith-driven travelers

The Indian economy has witnessed a significant push towards infrastructure, real estate and tourism, especially spiritual tourism especially in the 2025-26 Union Budget. The government's focus on urban redevelopment, affordable housing, and tourism-friendly policies has positioned India as a global hotspot for real estate and hospitality investments. Among the most prominent emerging trends is the rise of religious realty—an intersection of real estate, hospitality, and spiritual tourism, where projects are developed to cater to the growing number of pilgrims and faith-driven travellers. With disposable incomes on the rise due to tax relief measures—such as no income tax



MAYANK JAISWAL

up to Rs 12 lakh under the new tax regime—India's middle class is set to invest more in homeownership and travel. Additionally, the introduction of the Rs 15,000 crore SWAMIH Fund 2 for affordable and mid-income housing will fast-track stalled projects, ensuring homebuyers see the fruiting of their investments. Simultaneously, India's hospitality sector is poised for an

exponential rise, with 50 top-tier tourist destinations being developed with state partnerships, reinforcing the nation's status as a must-visit destination for both spiritual and leisure travellers. **The Rise of Religious Realty: A New Era in Development** India's spiritual destinations have long been major attractions for domestic and international tourists. However, what was once a fragmented market with limited infrastructure is now being transformed into a sophisticated segment within the hospitality and real estate industries. The religious tourism boom has led to a surge in demand for premium hotels, commercial complexes, and mixed-use developments that cater to both pilgrims and high-end

travellers. The Solitaire Group has been at the forefront of this evolution. Recognising the immense potential in religious realty, it has strategically invested in prime pilgrimage destinations such as Ayodhya, Varanasi, Prayagraj, and Haridwar. Its flagship development in Ayodhya—a luxury Taj hotel in partnership with the Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL)—exemplifies its commitment to redefining spiritual tourism. The 300-key Taj Ayodhya, spanning 7.2 acres, will feature high-end villas, luxury accommodations, wellness facilities, and state-of-the-art banqueting spaces to cater to both pilgrims and travellers seeking opulent experiences. **Unlocking the Potential of Tier II and III Cities**



The narrative of real estate growth in India is no longer limited to metro cities. Government-backed infrastructure projects, improved regional connectivity under the modified UDAN scheme, and growing investor interest are propelling the development of Tier II and III cities. Cities with religious and cultural significance are seeing an influx of premium residential and commercial projects, as

demand for quality real estate soars. The Solitaire Group has been a pioneer in this domain. Its developments in Prayagraj, including the city's first and largest township, are a testament to its vision of creating world-class urban spaces beyond metro hubs. Through strategic land acquisitions and partnerships, the Group aims to bridge the infrastructure gap in smaller cities and deliver projects that enhance both living standards and economic prosperity. **Hospitality Meets Spiritual Tourism** India's push for religious and spiritual tourism has been backed by key government initiatives, including hotels in pilgrimage hubs being added to the Infrastructure Harmonised Master List (HML), ensuring

easier access to low-cost financing, streamlined e-visa services and visa fee waivers for select international tourists to encourage global arrivals, and MUDRA loans for homestays to support budget travel and rural tourism. This structured approach to hospitality growth has enabled developers like the Solitaire Group to envision and execute projects that cater to a diverse range of travellers. The focus remains on integrating world-class amenities into heritage-rich locations while maintaining the cultural and spiritual essence of these sites. **Building a Legacy of Excellence** Since its inception in 2005, the Solitaire Group has established itself as a leading player in real estate and hospitali-

ty. From residential developments in emerging urban centres to luxury hotels in religious destinations, its portfolio reflects its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and excellence. With the Indian government's ambitious push for infrastructure, tourism, and real estate reforms, the opportunities in religious realty are boundless. Indian leading players would continue this transformative journey, crafting spaces that offer both spiritual fulfilment and contemporary luxury. The focus is on delivering exceptional living experiences and fostering economic growth in the communities that are being served. (The author is the founder and CEO of Solitaire Group. Views expressed are personal)







# Profit booking leading FIIs to sell Indian equities: FM

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Seeking to assuage concerns over Foreign Institutional Investors (FII) selling Indian equities lately, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday attributed the action to profit booking. Speaking to reporters in the financial capital, Sitharaman said the Indian economy is one where the investors are bagging better returns which leads to profit booking. "FIIs also go out when they are able to or in a position to book profits. Indian market today, Indian economy today, has an environment in which investments are also yielding good returns and profit booking is also happening," she said. It can be noted that FIIs have sold over ₹1.56 Lakh Crore of stocks since October last year, including nearly ₹1 Lakh Crore



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addresses a press conference, in Mumbai

in 2025 itself, which has led to a sharp correction on the indices and wiping out investor wealth. Finance Secretary Tuhiin Kanta Pandey said FIIs are not moving from one emerging market to other, and added that

in times of global uncertainties like the one being witnessed right now, they tend to go back to the country of origin, which is mostly the US. He also hinted that these shifts may be temporary, and added

that Indian markets are resilient. Explaining that apart from demand-supply issues, growth prospects also influence investor behavior, Pandey said India remains the fastest growing large economy and

added that the recently announced Budget has a slew of growth-oriented measures. "We have faced global headwinds in the past, and will continue to face them. But I think India is in a strong position to handle it," he added. Ajay Seth, Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs, dismissed any idea of a government interference in the market because of the heavy sell-offs, stating that such a move can be carried out only if there is any evidence of market failure, which is not the case at present. Seth said equities do not function on government policies alone, and added that foreign investors go to developed or bigger markets in periods of uncertainties. He said that while India has shown resilience when it comes to world events in parts, it is not fully de-coupled either.

# Experts intrigued by inclusion of electoral bonds in Income Tax Bill

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Experts are intrigued by the new Income Tax Bill, 2025 retaining provisions related to electoral bonds, which were rendered unconstitutional by the Supreme Court last year, saying it could be because of legislative oversight or the government's intention to bring it back in some other form. Electoral bonds have been mentioned in the new Income Tax Bill's Schedule VIII which deals with 'Income not to be included in the total income of political parties and electoral trusts'. In a judgement passed on February 15 last year, the Supreme Court had scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" as it was "violative" of the right to "freedom of speech and expression and right to information."

Under the existing Income Tax Act, 1961, donations received from companies and individuals through electoral bonds are exempt in the hands of political parties. The government has brought in a new Income Tax Bill to replace the 64-year old I-T Act. The 622-page Bill is a simplified version of the existing Act which has become complicated over the years because of over 4,000 amendments. About the electoral bond related provisions in the new I-T Bill, AMRG and associates senior partner Rajat Mohan said the mention of electoral bond provisions in the new Income Tax Bill could be because of a legislative oversight, or a deliberate move to keep the door open for a modified version of the scheme in the future. "While the Supreme Court had strong and justified grounds for striking down

the scheme, the concerns it highlighted can be addressed through structured dialogue and expert consultations. The government still retains the legislative authority to reintroduce a revised political donation framework, provided it aligns with constitutional principles and ensures transparency in electoral funding," he said. Mohan said mentioning of the electoral bond in the new Bill may be a strategic decision by policymakers to leave room for future electoral financing reforms. Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas and Co Partner Rohit Garg said the changes in the new income tax bill are merely structural in nature. There have been no major changes in the substantive provisions and the charging sections. Every provision which was not rendered obsolete has been carried forward into the new Act.

# IPO-bound NSDL profit jumps 30 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) on Monday reported a 30 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to ₹85.8 Crore for three months ended December 2024. The depository registered ₹66.09 Crore profit in the year-ago period. The total income rose 16.2 per cent to ₹391.21 Crore in the October-December quarter of the current financial year (FY25) against ₹336.67 Crore in the same quarter preceding fiscal, NSDL said in a statement. For the nine months ended December 2024, NSDL posted a 32.6 per cent year-on-year growth in net profit to ₹259.82 Crore and a 13.3 per cent year-on-year increase in total income to ₹1,141.4 Crore. NSDL is India's first securities depository to reach ₹500 Lakh Crore (\$6 Trillion) in value of assets held in custody in September 2024. In October, NSDL received markets regulator Sebi's go-

ahead to launch an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO is a complete offer for sale (OFS) of more than 5.72 Crore equity shares by shareholders, including National Stock Exchange of India (NSE), State Bank of India (SBI), and HDFC Bank, as per the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). Since the public issue is completely an OFS, NSDL will not receive any proceeds from the IPO. NSDL is a SEBI-registered infrastructure institution offering a wide range of products and services to the financial and securities markets in India. Following the introduction of the Depositories Act in 1996, NSDL pioneered the dematerialisation of securities in India in November 1996. This will become the country's second publicly traded depository to list on the bourse, after Central Depository Services (CDSL), which got listed on NSE in 2017.

# Udaan secures \$75 million in funding round

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Online business-to-business platform Udaan has closed a Series G equity funding round of \$75 Million, led by M and G Plc, according to people in the know. Company Co-Founder and CEO Vaibhav Gupta announced the round's closure to employees on Monday, and mentioned that the company is in advanced discussions to close an additional equity round of \$25 Million from potential investors in the "coming quarter". The Series G funding round, led by M and G Plc and supported by existing investors like Lightspeed Venture Partners, comes after a \$340 Million fundraise in December 2023. A query to the company did not elicit any response till the filing of this story. Udaan intends to use the newly acquired capital to improve customer experience, expand its market reach, strengthen partnerships with vendors, and bolster long-term capabilities in supply chain



and credit, sources said. Last month, The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) gave a green light for Udaan to merge its multiple business entities into one - Hiveloop Ecommerce Pvt Ltd. The unification of its business under a single umbrella strengthens Udaan's operating model as it prepares for a potential IPO in 2026. The company is on track to achieving profitability, with

a 65 per cent revenue growth and over 70 per cent increase in daily transacting buyers, the sources said. Founded in 2016, Udaan enables technology-based supply chain and logistics operations, focusing on B2B trade. It operates across diverse categories, including FMCG, staples, fruits and vegetables, and pharma. It claims to hold about 70 per cent market share in India.

# Airtel completes landing of SEA-ME-WE-6 submarine cable

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel on Monday said it has completed the landing of the new Southeast Asia-Middle East-West Europe-6 or SMW6 (SEA-ME-WE 6) submarine cable system in Chennai. The company recently landed the SEA-ME-WE 6 cable in Mumbai on December 30, 2024. "The cable landing, both in Mumbai and Chennai, will be fully integrated with Airtel's data centre arm, Nxta by Airtel, at its large facilities in the respective cities with an aim to enable global hyperscalers and businesses in the country to seamlessly access international connectivity and data centre services," Bharti Airtel said in a release. These cable landings were completed by SubCom, a leading supplier of subsea fibre optic cable data systems responsible for the engineering, manufacture and installation of SEA-ME-WE-6. Cable landing stations connect submarine cable systems with

land-based networks. According to the release, the 21,700 route kilometres (Rkm) submarine cable system connects India to Singapore and France (Marseille) crossing Egypt through terrestrial cables. With this, Airtel has further enhanced its network presence with diversified capacity in the submarine cable system, globally. Sharat Sinha, Director and CEO of Airtel Business, said this new investment and milestone would further improve the company's secure, diverse and scalable global network. "We are delighted to further strengthen our global connectivity by landing one of the largest cable systems into our facilities. This complements our existing network strength of 400,000Rkms across 50 countries," Sinha said, adding that the move underlines Bharti Airtel's commitment to address Digital India's growing demand for global connectivity and data with additional routes, diversity

and capacity. As a key member of the consortium of the SEA-ME-WE-6 cable system, Airtel has invested in the core cable and has additionally co-built a private network of four Fiber Pairs between Singapore, Chennai and Mumbai. This cable system will bring a whopping 220 terabits per second (TBPs) of global capacity to India. Airtel's global network spans five continents. The company has investments in 34 cables globally with some of the recent ones, including two Africa, Southeast Asia-Japan Cable 2 (SJC2) and Equiano. Apart from these cables that connect India to key regions like Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and US, Airtel's global subsea network investments also include large cable systems like i2i Cable Network (i2icn), Europe India Gateway (EIG), IMEWE, SEA-ME-WE-4, AAG, Unity, EASSY, Gulf Bridge International (GBI) and Middle East North Africa Submarine Cable (MENA Cable) among others.

# Rupee falls 16 paise against USD Sensex, Nifty eke out gains in volatile session

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 16 paise to close at 86.87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by significant foreign fund outflows and a recovery in the US dollar index from intraday lows. Forex traders said the Indian rupee is trading with a negative bias as foreign banks went on a dollar-buying spree and importers scrambled to secure dollars, as they feared further depreciation amid global uncertainty. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.70 and touched the high of 86.68 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 86.88 before ending the session at 86.87 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 16 paise from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee extended its recovery and settled 21 paise higher at 86.71 against the US dollar. "Indian rupee declined today on a weak tone in the domestic markets and a recovery in the US dollar index from intraday lows. However, weak tone in crude oil prices and a decline in US



weigh on the rupee. However, any further decline in the US treasury yields or any further intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.14 per cent higher at 106.85. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.12 per cent to USD 74.83 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 57.65 points, or 0.08 per cent, to settle at 75,996.86, while the Nifty rose 30.25 points, or 0.13 per cent, to 22,959.50 points. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹4,294.69 Crore in the capital markets on a net basis on Friday, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, India's forex reserves jumped by \$7.654 Billion to \$638.261 Billion in the week ended February 7, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday. This is the third consecutive week of a jump in the kitty, which had increased by \$1.05 Billion to \$630.607 Billion for the week ended January 31.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets snapped the eight-day losing run in a volatile session on Monday with benchmark Sensex closing higher by 57 points on the back of value buying in blue-chip stocks HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries. Helped by fag-end buying, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 57.65 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 75,996.86. During the day, the barometer tanked 644.45 points or 0.84 per cent to 75,294.76. The NSE Nifty rebounded 30.25 points or 0.13 per cent to 22,959.50. Reports that the US and India will meet soon to decide on broad contours of a trade agreement for reducing tariffs supported buying in metal, pharma and financial shares, analysts said. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Bajaj Finserv, Power Grid, IndusInd Bank, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, HDFC Bank, Zomato and Tata Motors were among the major gainers. Mahindra and Mahindra,



Bharti Airtel, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, ICICI Bank, and ITC were the biggest laggards. Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) offloaded equities worth ₹4,294.69 Crore on Friday, according to exchange data. The total outflow by FPIs has reached ₹99,299 Crore - near ₹1 Lakh Crore - in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed. FPIs pulled out ₹21,272 Crore in the first two weeks of this month, driven by global

tensions after the US imposed tariffs on imports. This came following a net outflow of ₹78,027 Crore in January. "Markets eked out modest gains in late recovery in a highly volatile trade, but most importantly it managed to halt the eight-session losing streak. "Positive Asian and European indices aided sentiment, while gains in select banking, oil and gas, metal and power stocks helped local benchmarks recover from their early lows,"

Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.51 per cent, while smallcap index declined 0.56 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, healthcare jumped 1.14 per cent, energy (0.89 per cent), services (0.82 per cent), metal (0.76 per cent), power (0.75 per cent), oil and gas (0.74 per cent). Consumer Discretionary, industrials, IT, telecommunication, auto, tech and BSE Focused IT were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading higher. US markets ended mostly lower on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.21 per cent higher at USD 74.90 a barrel. The BSE benchmark dropped 199.76 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 75,939.21 on Friday. The Nifty declined 102.15 points or 0.44 per cent to 22,929.25.

# Bajaj Consumer Care to acquire Vishal Personal Care

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

FMCG firm Bajaj Consumer Care Limited will acquire rival Vishal Personal Care, which owns hair and skin care brand Banjara's, at an enterprise value of ₹108.3 Crore to deepen its penetration in the South Indian market. The board of Bajaj Consumer Care Ltd (BCCL), which operates in the personal care space and owns the Bajaj Almond Drops brand, in its meeting held last Friday, approved the acquisition 100 per cent stake in Vishal Personal Care in two tranches - a 49 per cent in the first followed by remaining 51 per cent in the second tranche. "The estimated transaction

value stands at ₹120 Crore, with an enterprise value of approximately ₹108.3 Crore," BCCL said in a statement. This move aligns with BCCL's vision to expand its footprint across Indian markets, leveraging the growing demand for natural and Ayurvedic personal care products, it added. Banjara's, founded in 1991 in Hyderabad, has a diversified product portfolio, including facial kits, herbal powders, aloe vera gels, shampoos, and hair care powders. Its products have a retail presence of over 70,000 outlets across the five South Indian markets through cosmetics stores, supermarkets, pharmacies, and grocery chains. "With the acquisition of Vishal Personal Care, BCCL

will be leveraging Vishal's extensive distribution network to deepen their penetration in South India," BCCL said, adding that it "will also introduce brand Banjara's products in its stronghold Hindi-speaking markets (HSM), effectively doubling its reach in both the regions." BCCL Managing Director Jaideep Nandi said, "Acquisition of Vishal Personal Care Pvt Ltd is a strategic step in strengthening BCCL's footprint in the five southern markets. The addition of Banjara's to our portfolio enhances our ability to serve the evolving consumers across India, while also complementing our product range for further expansion."

# Centre considering raising deposit insurance limit above ₹5 Lakh

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The government is "actively considering" raising the deposit insurance limit beyond the current ₹5 Lakh, a top finance ministry official said on Monday. Days after the New India Co-operative Bank scam came to light, Department of Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju announced that such a proposal is in the works. "The point about increasing insurance. That is under active consideration. As and when the government approves, we will notify it," he said at a press conference in the presence of

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. He, however, declined to speak on the crisis at New India Co-operative Bank, saying the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is seized of the matter. A deposit insurance claim gets triggered when a lender goes down, and over the years, the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) has paid out such claims. The body collects premiums from banks for the cover it offers, and a majority of the claims have had to be done in case of cooperative lenders. It can be noted that following the PMC Bank scam, the

DICGC insured limit was raised to ₹5 Lakh from ₹1 Lakh in 2020. Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth said the cooperative banking sector is well regulated under the RBI's watch and termed the overall health of the sector as strong. A crisis at one entity should not lead anybody to cast doubts on the overall sector, he added, pointing out that it is the job of the regulator to take actions against errant entities. As per reports, 90 per cent of New India Co-operative Bank's 1.3 Lakh depositors will have their entire sums covered under the DICGC.

# IL&FS Group initiates ₹5,000 Crore interim payout to creditors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The IL&FS Group on Monday said the company has initiated ₹5,000 Crore interim payout to eligible creditors as part of its ongoing resolution mandate. Post this payout, the company said that the aggregate debt discharged will stand at approximately ₹43,000 Crore, which is over 70 per cent of the estimated total debt resolution target pegged at ₹61,000 Crore. "IL&FS Group companies have initiated an interim distribution of ₹5,000 Crore

- ₹3,500 Crore of Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) units and ₹1,500 Crore in cash to eligible creditors as part of the Group's ongoing resolution efforts," the statement said. The interim distribution is largely being initiated by three holding companies - Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS), IL&FS Financial Services (IFIN), and IL&FS Transportation Networks (ITNL) - that collectively hold the majority of the Group's debt and nests large creditors and public funds.

# Liverpool continues its charge with a 2-1 win against Wolverhampton

PTI ■ LONDON

Liverpool continued its charge toward the Premier League title with a 2-1 win against Wolverhampton. For Manchester United, it just keeps getting worse after a 1-0 loss at Tottenham. The fortunes of England's two most successful teams could hardly be more contrasting. Victory for Liverpool saw the club restore its seven-point lead over Arsenal at the top of the table and move ever closer to equaling Man United's record haul of 20 league crowns.

United, meanwhile, lost for the 12th time in the league this season and is 15th in the standings after James Maddison's first-half strike for Spurs.

It is turning out to be another miserable campaign for the club that dominated English soccer under former manager Alex Ferguson. That is a distant memory now, with United's wait to end its title drought set to extend to 12 years this season.

United has not been champion since Ferguson's final campaign in 2013. Ruben Amorim is the sixth permanent coach since then to be charged with the responsibility of restoring its supremacy, but his

early tenure has been fraught with problems.

"I am not worried. I understand our fans, what the media think about it. I hate to lose, that feeling is the worst," Amorim said. "I am here to help my players. I understand my situation, my job, I am confident on my work and I just want to win games. The place in the table is my worry, I am not worried about me."

## CLASH OF CLUBS IN CRISIS

This was Amorim's ninth defeat in 21 games in all competitions since taking over in November. He has only overseen four league wins in that time.

He already claimed in January that this could be the worst United team in the club's storied history and there is little sign of improvement.

Against a Spurs team that is also struggling in the wrong half of the table, Maddison's goal in the 13th minute at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium was enough to settle this clash of clubs in crisis. Some Tottenham fans are so dismayed by the state of their club that they staged a pre-match protest against chairman Daniel Levy. But this was the third time their team had beaten United this season. There could yet be a fourth



encounter if both teams continue to advance in the Europa League. But the Premier League is Amorim's primary concern right now — even if a relegation fight remains unlikely. Despite being just three places above the drop zone, United is 12 points above the safety line.

That is little to shout about with United eight points off the top half.

## NERVOUS LIVERPOOL

Liverpool had to withstand a fightback from Wolves, which included a brilliant long-range goal from Mathew Cunha. First-half strikes from Luis Diaz

and Mohamed Salah secured the win for Arne Slot's team, but an unconvincing performance after the break saw the home team fail to register a single shot on target as Wolves dominated the chances. "Obviously 2-0 at halftime, we know that can be one of the most dangerous results in football. We

had to come out and we had to start well — and we didn't quite do that," said Liverpool defender Andrew Robertson. "When they scored, everyone gets nervous. The players get nervous, the crowd get nervous — of course that's only natural. But it's a massive win for us and another game down." Diaz bundled the ball over the line from close range in the 15th minute to give Liverpool the lead. And Salah doubled the advantage from the penalty spot in the 37th after Diaz was brought down.

It was the Egypt international's 28th goal of an outstanding season and extended his current scoring streak to six straight games. But if the home crowd was expecting a routine victory against 17th-placed Wolves, it was anything but.

Liverpool conceded a goal in stoppage time to draw 2-2 with Everton on Wednesday and was pushed again.

Cunha's drag-back and curled finish from around 20 yards (meters) in the 67th came after a sustained period of pressure from the visitors.

Before that Marshall Munetsi was denied when through on goal — it took a crucial block in front of goal from Jarell Quansah to prevent

him from converting late on. "In a season where you want to achieve something, you need to have wins like this as well," Slot said.

## INJURY CRISIS

United named eight teenagers on the bench who had never played a senior game for the club following an injury crisis at Old Trafford. Amad Diallo is likely to miss the rest of the season with an ankle injury and Lisandro Martinez has already been ruled out with cruciate ligament damage.

Amorim was also without Leny Yoro, Kobbie Mainoo, Manuel Ugarte and Toby Collyer through injury or illness at Spurs. It meant the United coach waited until the first minute of time added on to make a substitution — replacing Casemiro for debutant Chido Obi.

## FANS PROTEST

Tottenham fans protested outside the stadium before kickoff, calling for chairman Daniel Levy and owner ENIC to go. Giant banners read "Profits before glory" and "We want our club back" as supporters let their feelings be known. The protest was organised by a fans' group called "Change for Tottenham".

# Frankfurt beats Kiel 3-1

PTI ■ BERLIN

Eintracht Frankfurt snapped its run of three draws and consolidated third place in the Bundesliga with a 3-1 win over relegation-threatened Holstein Kiel. Hugo Ekitike saw a penalty saved and had a late goal ruled out for offside, but others stepped up to score the goals that showed Frankfurt can live without Egypt forward Omar Marmoush.

Marmoush, Frankfurt's top-scorer with 15 league goals this season, joined Manchester City for a reported 70 million euros (\$73 million) during the winter transfer period and scored a hat trick for his new team on Saturday.

"We sent an extremely young team onto the field, one that played with confidence, composure and maturity," Frankfurt coach Dino Toppmöller said.

"We've finally won again and now gone seven league games in a row without defeat," he said. "The table looks nice, but there are still many games to play. We have to stay confident."

Toppmöller's team moved five points clear of fourth-placed



Leipzig, which occupies the last place for Champions League qualification after 22 of 34 rounds.

## Goal gift

Hugo Larsson broke the deadlock with his knee in the 18th minute, and Brazilian defender Tuta was left free at the back post to score Frankfurt's second in the 37th after Kiel failed to deal with a corner.

Ekitike had the chance to make it 3-0 before the break but Thomas Dähne dived the right way to push away the French forward's penalty.

Frankfurt was later gifted the third goal anyway. Can Uzun gratefully took David Zec's botched backpass to score his

fourth goal of the season in the 59th.

Kiel's Finn Porath scored at the third attempt in the 73rd after Kevin Trapp saved his first two efforts but it wasn't enough to stop Kiel dropping to last place after this round of games. Bochum climbed off the bottom by defeating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 on Saturday.

Kiel could take some solace from Heidenheim's 2-0 loss at home to Mainz in Sunday's late game. Heidenheim stayed on 14 points, ahead of Bochum on goal difference, and just a point above Kiel. Hoffenheim came from behind to win 3-1 at Werder Bremen in the early game.

# Tejas Dhingra retains Show Jumping title

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tejas Dhingra Defends National Championship Title at NEC Show Jumping 2024-25 Tejas Dhingra of Beeya's Riding Facility successfully defended his National Championship title at the National Equestrian Championship (Show Jumping) 2024-25, held at Modi Equestrian Academy in Meerut on Sunday. The reigning champion secured victory in the Championship Tour with 16 points, finishing ahead of joint runners-up Amar Sarin from Tarc Equestrian Centre and Ashray Butta of EGC Stables.

Meanwhile, Yashaan Zubin Khambatta of Tarc Equestrian Centre achieved a remarkable double triumph, dominating both the Novice and Medium Tours. In the Medium Tour, Sehaj Singh Virk and Abhishek Chopra shared second place, while in the Novice Tour, Narayan Singh secured the runner-up position, joining Yashaan on the podium after the latter impressively claimed the top



two spots.

On Saturday, the Preliminary Tour Individual Final saw Avik Bhatia of Modi Equestrian Stables clinch the gold medal with a flawless performance and a time of 31.02 seconds. Major Ritika Dahiya of Team ASC delivered a strong showing to secure second place, while Dushyant Nagar finished third.

A standout moment of the competition was the performance of 13-year-old Sravya Vohra, the youngest participant. She impressed with her composure and skill, finishing fifth overall. In recognition of her remarkable effort, the Modi Equestrian Academy and the Equestrian Federation of India awarded her a Special Appreciation Prize.

# Indian women aims to return to winning ways against Spain

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian women's hockey team will be eager to get back to winning ways when it faces a confident Spain in the doubleheader here.

After a promising start with a thrilling 3-2 victory over England in their opener, the India narrowly missed out on a bonus point in their second game, losing 2-1 in a dramatic shootout after the match ended 2-2 in regulation time. Despite showing resilience, India currently sit in eighth place in the standings with four points from two games and will be looking to climb higher in the points table as they face a confident Spanish side on Tuesday and Wednesday.

India's performance against England offered glimpses of their potential, particularly in penalty corner conversions, where they scored twice from three attempts in their opening match. However, they failed to replicate that success in the second game, unable to convert any of their



three penalty corners. "Spain is a tricky team, and we know it's going to be a challenging contest. However, we are ready for the challenge," India captain Salima Tete said.

"We've analysed our performances against England and identified the areas where we need to improve, especially in converting penalty corners. We are focused on tightening our defense and making the most of our scoring opportunities."

Spain, on the other hand, arrives on the back of two consecutive victories against

Germany in the India leg. They secured back-to-back 2-1 wins over the Germans, boosting their confidence. Despite their strong recent performances, Spain has had a mixed run overall, with just two wins and one shootout victory in six games.

Currently placed fourth in the points table with eight points, Spain will be looking to further consolidate their position. Patricia Alvarez has been their standout player, scoring twice to lead the team's goal tally.

Match starts 5:15 PM on Tuesday and 7:30 PM on Wednesday.

# Justin Leonard wins Chubb Classic for first PGA Tour Champions victory

PTI ■ NAPLES

Justin Leonard won the Chubb Classic for his first PGA Tour Champions victory, overcoming a slow start with a back-nine charge on Tiburon's Black Course. Leonard birdied five of the last seven holes for a 4-under 68 and a four-stroke victory over Billy Andrade. The 52-year-old Texan won in his 45th start on the 50-and-over tour, his first victory since the last of his 12 PGA Tour titles in the 2008 St. Jude Championship.

"It's been a long time since I've won, and I tell myself all the time that I have won," Leonard said, fighting back tears on the 18th green. "But it's easy to kind of forget a little bit, and say, 'Well, you know, is it going to be?'"

"I just put a lot of work in. ... I mean, last year was so bad it was good. It was good for me. Made some changes with my golf swing. ... It's just so fun to finally be here because I always felt like I would be. But it's nice to finally get it done."

After a bogey on 10 dropped him to 1 over for the day, Leonard scrambled for a key par on the 11th, then birdied the next three.

He scrambled again for par on the par-3 16th, then got a 30-footer to catch the right edge for birdie on the par-4 17th and got up-and-down from a greenside bunker on the par-5 18th for one last birdie.

"I just kept telling myself that I was still in it," Leonard said. "I felt like my best golf was ahead of me. I played



OK the first 10 holes. Eleven, the end of it was good, but it just wasn't my best golf. I kept telling myself to just own the last seven holes. Once I got a little bit of momentum I felt like I could ride it."

Leonard finished at 15-under 201. He shot 65 on

Saturday to take a one-stroke lead and set himself up for the breakthrough victory in his return to competitive golf after a long run as a television analyst.

Leonard has starred at all levels, winning the 1992 U.S. Amateur and 1994 NCAA title for Texas to cap his

amateur career, then taking the 1997 British Open at Royal Troon and making the winning putt in the 1999 Ryder Cup at Brookline.

"I didn't think about anything in particular today, but just knowing I've been there," Leonard said. "Even though it might have been 10, 20, 30 years ago, I've been able to do it before."

Andrade also shot 68. Darren Clarke was third at 10 under, also shooting 68. Fred Couples had a 66 to tie for fourth at 9 under with Richard Green (68), Heath Slocum (70) and Paul Stankowski (71).

Ernie Els, a stroke behind Leonard entering the day, shot a 75 to finish 11th at 7 under. Bernhard Langer closed with a 70 to tie for 12th at 6 under.

# India look to continue winning momentum against German hockey

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Their campaign back on track after a jittery start, India will look to continue the winning momentum when they take on Paris Olympics silver medallist Germany in their next men's FIH Pro League match on Tuesday.

India had a woeful start to their home leg matches of the Pro League, losing 1-3 to Spain in their opener.

But the hosts bounced back strongly to tame Spain 2-0 in the return match on Sunday.

With three points from two games, India are currently sitting in eighth place in the standings and will be desperate to climb up the table. After a relatively off day

on Saturday, the Indians looked a completely different side on Sunday, dominating for most part of the match and scoring two field goals through Mandeep Singh (32nd minute) and Dilpreet Singh (39th) to pocket all three points.

While the strikers shone bright in the second game, India's chief coach Craig Fulton would be a bit concerned about penalty corner conversions.

Despite winning seven penalty corners across their two games, India failed to convert a single chance.

In the absence of India captain Harmanpreet Singh, who was rested for the second match, Hockey India League

star performer Jugraj Singh cut a sorry figure from set pieces. The forwardline comprising Dilpreet, Mandeep and Sukhjeet Singh have each netted a goal for India so far in the tournament and will be looking to add to their tally against Germany.

The Indian defence produced a much-better display in the second game, and were able to absorb pressure from the Spanish strikers.

Germany, who will be playing their first match of the India leg, are placed just above India in seventh place with four points from as many games and will be determined to turn their fortunes around.

# Cricket fever grips Pakistan ahead of Champions Trophy

PTI ■ KARACHI

Cricket fever has gripped Pakistan as the Champions Trophy unfolds with fans eagerly waiting for the action to begin here on Wednesday and businesses related to the game too picking up before the tournament opener between hosts Pakistan and New Zealand.

However, many in the country are disappointed that India are not playing their matches in Pakistan.

"It is disappointing because generally there is so much admiration for the Indian team and players, especially Virat Kohli, in our country," shopkeeper Moiz Ahmed said at the famous Zainab Market in the heart of Karachi's bustling Saddar area. Moiz is surprised at the demand for the Indian shirts

among the cricket fans along with the Pakistan team.

"Virat Kohli definitely has a big fan following in Pakistan," he said as youngsters mingled in the shop choosing different team shirts.

Kashif, a college student, said he had always admired Kohli as a player and also because of his humility.

"He is so down to earth in his behaviour from what we see in the media," he said.

Shopkeepers in Zainab market, which is famous for selling original licenses and copies of the team shirts whenever a big cricket or football event happens, are clearly happy that the Champions Trophy is being held in Pakistan.

"I have sold nearly 4 to 5000 shirts in the last three days of the Pakistan and Indian teams," Javed Pakhali, a

shopkeeper, said. Even in the enclosures during matches fans are not shy to wear or display pictures of Kohli and wear shirts with his name printed on them.

The Champions Trophy fever is also evident when one visits the match venue, National Stadium, as many fans are moving around the main gate to catch a glimpse of their favourite players as they come and go from the stadium.

On Monday, with the Pakistan team having a practice session at the stadium's high performance centre, fans clamoured to see them in action.

Ticket sales online and through booths have also picked up according to a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official who now just wants the Pakistan team to do well in the tournament.



"I am sure if the team keeps on winning the demand for tickets will keep on increasing," he said.

The fact that an ICC event is being held in Pakistan with some matches in Karachi is now evident from the colourful banners, posters put

up around the city announcing the staging of the event.

It is after 29 years that Pakistan is holding a proper multi-team event although it hosted some matches of the Asia Cup in 2023 but the excitement didn't reach the levels being witnessed now.

Although the PCB and ICC held a low-key opening ceremony, without the teams at the Lahore Fort on Sunday night, in Karachi clearly the tempo is growing.

Former captain Javed Miandad praised the PCB for bringing the ICC event to Pakistan.

"I think the next few weeks are a celebration of the passion for cricket we have as a nation," Miandad said.

Miandad said that it is after a long time cricket fans will get to see top international players in action in their backyard. PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi also said at the opening ceremony that the tournament was a platform for Pakistan to showcase its hospitality and love for cricket.

For 10 years, no top team visited Pakistan after the

militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March 2009.

Pace great Waqar Younis said having the Champions Trophy in the country was a big step forward for Pakistan cricket.

"I think it means a lot to everyone that we have shown how resilient we were as a cricket nation and how much our people love cricket even when for 10 years no top team played in Pakistan."

Waqar, also a former captain and who was head coach when Pakistan were their home matches in UAE, said there was a big difference between playing at home and your home series in UAE.

"I think this Champions Trophy will only increase the cricket passion and talent in the country," he added.

Naqvi also said they would be trying to get more ICC events

in Pakistan.

He said, hopefully, Pakistan would also host the women's World Cup qualifiers later this year.

The security for the tournament is unprecedented and with Naqvi himself heading the federal interior ministry, no chances are being taken for the visiting teams.

Senior police official SSP Muquadas Haider said that the PCB and security agencies had planned things in such a way that visiting players also got a chance to go out and see the city.

Pakistan play New Zealand in the tournament opener and everyone expects a full house despite the ticket prices being on the higher side.

The provincial government has also declared a public holiday on Wednesday for a religious festival.

India hope for Shami's wrist magic to reclaim Champions Trophy

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Mohammed Shami's right hand has more sleight than a magician. A simple cock of his wrist can outfox the best batters in the world.

is all set to partner Arshdeep Singh. But for all his skills and promise, Arshdeep is not yet at Bumrah's level.

So, can Shami drag the train forward all by himself?

Former India pacer Laxmipathy Balaji found no reason to believe otherwise. "Actually, he had out-bowled Bumrah in the 2019 (50-over World Cup) and in the last World Cup (2023). Bumrah is the champion bowler across formats.



But can he find his optimal and ideal running speed, because Shami's effectiveness totally depends on his rhythm. Balaji thought it was not a task beyond Shami.

"Since that (ankle) injury has happened, there was a little bit of slowness, maybe. It's natural. But there is nothing you can do about it. It's part of any sportsperson's career.

"He has the experience to get over it and he will do it as he bowls more. It's just about accepting the (physical) condition and continuing his best practices," he said.

However, Shami's duty will not be just restricted to taking wickets, as the senior bowler will also have to guide understudies like Arshdeep and Harshit Rana during the course of the Champions Trophy.

"Now, if he starts striking with the new ball the confidence it gives to other bowlers will be huge," he said. It could be a blessing for Shami that India is playing their matches in Dubai, a venue where pacers found appreciable help in the past.

How does Shami manage to be so effective with the new ball? "Shami has one of the best wrist positions in the game, helping him bring all of his variations. See, conditions in Dubai will more or less be similar to India, so he just needs to follow his methods there," he added.

So, what are those methods? "What Shami does is hit the seam and move the ball off the deck. It is dangerous as batsmen will not be able to guess easily which way the ball is going to move.

"It also brings into the equation the LBWs and clean bowled dismissals. The away movement ensures that slip cordon too will be in the mix," said Balaji. "And he also bowls closer to the stumps, which allows him to explore those subtle angles. So, he will always be among the wickets," he added.

But Shami will have another reason to go full tilt in the Champions Trophy.

Despite achieving so much in his career, the Bengal man is yet to win a global trophy, the status brag for any cricketer. And already closer to the dog days of his career, Shami might not get another chance to do it either. It might give him that extra dose of motivation to run in hard in Dubai heat, snap his wrists, before batsmen walk out with a confused stare at the splayed stumps.

Malewar, Shorey lead Vidarbha to 308/5 against Mumbai

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Danish Malewar's gritty 79 and opener Dhruv Shorey's attractive 74 made up for a gritty batting show by hosts Vidarbha as they reached 308 for 5 against defending champions Mumbai on the first day of their Ranji Trophy semi-final here on Monday.

stands to see them cross 300-run mark after Mumbai had sent down 88 overs in the day. Mumbai bowlers were also guilty of bowling as many as 13 no balls during the course of the opening day.

Left-arm spinner Shams Mulani (2/44 in 18 overs) was easily the best bowler on the day as he got appreciable bounce and some amount of purchase from the Jamtha track. Dube (2/35 in 9 overs) also had a couple wickets but one of them was more so because of a splendid one-handed diving catch by Suryakumar Yadav in the slip cordon.

That Mumbai failed to make more inroads was because of the two new ball bowlers Shardul

Thakur (0/57 in 14 overs) and Mohit Avasthi (0/61 in 14 overs) were way off the mark with both new ball and second new ball at the fag end of the day.

The morning session belonged to Shorey, who capitalised on the half-volleys provided by Avasthi, who simply doesn't have the required pace to trouble batters if he doesn't get to swing the new ball.

As far as Shardul is concerned, he fed Shorey on the legs and got whipped. It was left-arm Royston Dias, who got the breakthrough with a delivery that climbed on left-hander Atharva Taide (4) as the batter tried to shoulder arms. Shorey, a former Delhi opener, who hit nine boundaries, added 54 for the second wicket with left-hander Parth Rekhaide (23), who was out just before lunch trying to drive Dube but Surya standing at third slip showing brilliant reflexes to pouch it one-handed.

Malewar, who has been Vidarbha's find of the season, blended caution with aggression after lunch, dominating in his 51-run stand with Shorey.

Shorey, who looked good for a three-figure mark, was finally gone when Mulani got one to jump off length and it turned enough to carry the edge which Mumbai skipper Ajinkya Rahane gleefully accepted. Nair, who is in fantastic form this season, looked effortless while tackling both Mulani and off-spinner Tanush Kotian en route his 78-run fourth wicket stand with Malewar.

They were ready to use their feet with Malewar hitting the only six off the day off Mulani, who was otherwise in full control. Nair, who had hit six boundaries, looked in control before a delivery from Dube in the post-tea session moved a shade and was taken by keeper Akash Anand.

Pakistan's Haris Rauf resumes bowling in nets

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan's injured fast bowler Haris Rauf said on Monday he has resumed bowling in the nets and was feeling comfortable, adding that it was up to the team management to decide on his selection for the Champions Trophy (CT) opener against New Zealand.

"I have started doing exercises a few days back and also resumed bowling since yesterday," Haris told reporters at the National Stadium. "I am feeling comfortable and my body is okay now the team management will decide about my playing in the opening match," he said. Haris, who remains one of Pakistan's key fast bowlers with his express pace and ability to take wickets in the middle overs, sustained a muscular strain in his lower chest wall in the first match of the recently-held three-nation event. But he has remained with the squad despite the selectors calling up uncapped Akif Javed as a back-

up after the first game against New Zealand. Haris has a haul of 83 wickets in 46 one-day internationals and another 110 wickets in 79 T20 internationals, having built his reputation as a specialist white ball bowler. Haris also played down the presence of just one specialist spinner in the squad and noted that there were other spinners as well in Khushdil Shah, Salman Agha and Kamran Gulam. I think we have always formed a good bowling combination with pace and spin and it will not be different in the tournament."

GOVT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RURAL WORKS DIVISION PATNAGARH e-Procurement Notice

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES INVITATION OR BIDS (IFB) OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER BOUDH IRRIGATION DIVISION, BOUDH, PIN-762014

ZILLA PARISHAD MAYURBHANJ Date: 17.2.25 TENDER CALL NOTICE Supply & Installation of 68 Nos. of 75" Interactive Panel and 1 KVA Offline UPS for Smart Class Rooms of 33 Colleges in Mayurbhanj District

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State Health Assurance Society A1 Block, 2nd Floor, Toshali Bhawan, Satya Nagar Unit-9, Bhubaneswar - 751007, Odisha Phone/Fax:0674-2620500



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER SUNDARGARH IRRIGATION DIVISION, SUNDARGARH

NOTICE Susanta Kumar Sahu intends to create a change via mortgage or otherwise, on behalf of laminated original title deeds for the property Plot No-411/2342, Khata No-703/3132, Area-A 0.179 Dec, Status: Sthitiban, Mouza-Patrapada recorded in the name of Prasanta Kumar Sahu, Susanta Kumar Sahu and Basanta Kumar Sahu.

Odisha State AYUSH Society National AYUSH Mission Directorate of AYUSH Department of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of Odisha